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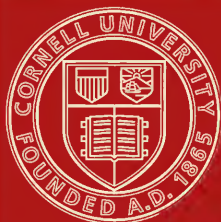
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THIS is intended to interest young men and women in the spiritual principles which underlie true Literature, and to give them a bias in the direction of these, as exhibited in the great writers. It is meant to be an incentive to wider reading, and to the deepening of acquaintance with books.

L. M'L. W.

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PART I

CHAPTER I

LITERATURE

LITERATURE is, by right of descent, the handmaid of prophecy, interpreting portents. When the Church was drowsing, or the State swaddled in ease, with its gouty foot on comfortable cushions, Literature has been as an arsenal of thunders that have wakened the sleepers, and of lightnings that have blasted wrong, and ploughed through the hearts of men avenues for the advent of right, liberty, and truth.

She has been, at her best, the protectress of the lowliest-born, who, without her for advocate, would have lain forgotten in their need, as bondsmen of death, poverty, and sorrow. Yet, even the highest have had grace of her ; for she it is who writes upon the memory of the ages, the names which time cannot obliterate. If she put her hand upon her lips, and keep her tongue still in regard to any man, however great and noble, he is doomed by her silence to absolute and entire oblivion.

Further, though she is the child of imagination, dipping her pen in fancy's brightest colours, she scorns a lie. If she sets men and women, with human sorrows and joys, moving upon her stage, they must be possible ;

though the possibilities of truth are illimitable, for human experience has tasted at bitterer streams, and been dazzled at brighter glories, than imagination has ever dreamed.

While abiding staunch to truth, Literature is not a mere recorder of time-tables, of mortal births and dyings—not a dictionary compiler, nor a gazetteer writer; she is not science, and she is not theology. She is the heart-beat of man; and that is how she appeals to, and holds, men. She is the shadow of life, with light upon her brow. The sorrow that is deeper than plummet ever sounded, the joy that soars beyond the limit of the skylark's wing, the tragedy that stalks through hell seeking for its mate, the failure that wanders by the Dead Sea shores, she knows about them all. Her servants and votaries, her priests and singers, her laughing Mercutios dying in the starlight of Verona streets, her Hamlets and Ophelias, have told her all about them, sobbing their story with dying lips above her beating breast.

How she has soothed human suffering, and hushed human passion! Yet this is not amazing, so much of our great Literature was upbuilt by suffering men. Want sat by the birth-bed of most of it; poverty was so often the forcing-ground of genius; while neglect spurred the toilers and thinkers to the victory that was waiting for them, like a resurrection, beyond their graves. Literature was always greater than her camp-followers, suffering, hunger, and want.

Varied as human experience itself has been the history of the literature of our race, from the songs of forgotten sagas, the stories of strong men who grappled for a hold upon lonely shores; on through the open-air pilgrimages of the fancy of Chaucer, the moral allegories of Spenser and Bunyan, the world of knighthood,

womanhood, manhood, and kinghood of Shakespeare and Scott, the eagle vision of Milton, the Nature worship of Wordsworth, the poetic philosophy touched with religious emotion of the generation immediately past, to the problem novel, and the uncertain voices of the poetry of to-day ! What a widening horizon our literature has seen, spreading away beyond the narrow seas ! A far cry to the start, and a far cry to the finish—nothing in the earth has been like it, so flexible, so soul-commanding, so time-mastering, since the old Greeks sank into their sleep.

The world has never been without its poets singing by listening seas, its voices whispering tales by sinking fires in the forests, till sleep touched weary hearts, or till the stars faded before the dawn. So it was natural that the drama and the novel should grow till they filled the range of men's thought, charming the leisure, and guiding the labours of the world. Cervantes, Le Sage, Balzac, Fielding, Defoe, Smollett, Richardson, Scott—Greene, hungry, in his coffin, with the laurel which his landlady put around his brow—Marlowe, slain in the Inn at Deptford ; and the innumerable host, like star-dust in the firmament of fancy—into what a variegated gamut of light the flame of Olympus split when it fell ; but what new ways it opened for the serving-men of Thought to walk in !

Largely to Samuel Johnson do we owe the growth of journalism, that modern giant whose feet are on the bones of the dead fighters of the past, moulding modern opinions, and keeping dark who the father of them is ; though we know that if, by some Röntgen process, we could see the skeleton behind the leading article and the critical review, we might be moved at once alike to laughter and to tears !

This is, of course, the age of the novel above every-

thing ; for it is the age when life goes by at a rush, and the world must have its slippers and a good tale by the fire in the evening.

The novel is what the old play was, and the old sermon, and more. For, in degraded days, the pulpit, when it was not a museum of religion dead and stuffed, and little dogmas tied around with windy names, became often a kind of spiritual shelter-house for shivering cold Morality, the poor relation of Religion ; while the stage, sometimes, was merely talking in its dreams. But if the novel slumber or maunder, it is lost and dead, in the remainder shops, and the pulp-mills, immediately !

The present age, besides, is set to the tune of the needs of others ; for the general heart of man has heard the still sad music of humanity, so that it wishes to learn everything about the lives of men and women. In the days of the giants of the past, Literature was a rose-garden, a field of lilies, a landscape of snowy mountains and stately-flowing streams, a world peopled only with the élite, calling in the commonalty rarely, and mostly then for laughter. “*Odi profanum vulgus*” was written on the lintel ; till Dickens, Hugo, and George Eliot recognised fully the claims of those who walked the common highway, through the sorrows and joys which were shared by the stately homes of England alike with the huts where poor men lie. Scott in Edie Ochiltree, Jeanie Deans, Dandie Dinmont, and Meg Merrilees had given beautifully touching glimpses ; Galt and Barrie gave a voice to the dumb proletariat of our own Scottish fields, often, with a kindly finger, blotting out faults. To-day the novel has travelled with the widening empire, bringing the big heart-beat of the woodlanders, the trappers, and the lumbermen out of the dreamy region of the broad-axe and the forest stillnesses ; and yet remembering home, drawing aside

the dingy curtains which hide the comedy, the struggle, and the hope that grappled failure, in the life of London streets, adding new pages to the book, and new colours to the page. And Literature, which was once thought of as only a Miltonic seraph, slips a grey cloak over her shining wings, and loves to become, in modern days, a "Little Sister of the Poor." The enthusiasm of humanity is the flame which she carries, and her heart is the lantern. It was lit first, away back in olden times, on the road to Canterbury, by "Dan" Chaucer, who loved his fellowmen. Although it has often been almost blown out, flickering in many a gust, as it was carried through the passion of distracted times, when men tried to make Literature a slave of politics and faction, yet it burns with a steady light to-day, cheering and strengthening; leading still in the way of righteousness, honourableness, true manliness, and pure womanliness all that are best, and that seek the highest in this life below the stars.

CHAPTER II

CULTURE

ALTHOUGH this busy age of ours has become somewhat materialistic in its outlook, it cannot escape being sometimes rebuked to an acknowledgment of the existence of Literature as the minister and prophet of culture. Even when you are running about your hasty business, the book-stall, with its accumulated ranks of ancient masterpieces in modern garb at a cheap rate, confronts you. Those miracles of printing, paper, and binding, mutely offering to be your mental companion and your heart-friend for anything from a shilling upwards, are irresistible. The majestic writers who, for so many ages, have been accustomed to the noblest housing in the finest libraries, who have whispered their deepest thoughts and inmost emotions to the hearts of philosophers, saints, and princes, in the intimate confidence of carpeted retirement, have now, like the kings of popular legend, taken to moving about among the common people. They unfold their secrets to keen eyes after the day's work is ended, and lie in the dark, beside the common household records, on rude shelves, by blinking firesides of the homes of the honest poor.

Culture is daily extending the borders of her kingdom. Literature of the highest kind has ceased to be the perquisite of only the rich and noble. It can be carried

now in the pocket of the peasant in the fields, and is at the command of his most ordinary savings. It is pitiable to think how a book had to be scraped and saved for, not so very long ago ; while now almost a few pence can acquire what our fathers coveted and yearned for, often vainly.

It is, of course, the desire of all to secure what is called success, to win prosperity in business, and to make some money if they can. But the life is more than meat. Man is always more than his situation and his wage. Not all the money in the world can be taken as his measurement. There is such a thing as the cultivation of the ideal, the enrichment of the spiritual, the growth of a soul within the clay. Your understanding demands food. Mental hunger and thirst have to be met and satisfied. The spirit seeks some explanation of the meaning of life's purposes. All the generations that have been before you have been led on by some kind of banner with some ideal written upon it. They have followed some star of hope. They have marched to some music which has meant much to their pulse-beat.

Of course, ideals have many shapes and sizes. There are chords of varied tones strung over the shell of a human heart. The House of Life has many windows to be cleaned, and many rooms to be furnished. There are, at any rate, two main departments in it, namely, that of the merely intellectual, and that of feeling. It is as though you entered by a single door, but on the one side were the offices, the reading-rooms, the schools of merely experimental knowledge, while on the other were the rooms of art and music, filled with witchery, hung with glamour. In the one you will find history in its mere dry bones of fact, statistics, records, and registers of all episodes, which, when put together, make something like a unity of human effort ; in the other, poetry, the utter-

ance of human passion, all the divinest thoughts, that, like great shining globules, slowly descend through time, as if from the star-strewn heavens, floating out of the unfathomable and invisible into the realm of mortal experience. Truth and Beauty, like stars that never set, brood and shine and flash above and about human horizons. And it is when a man, in a moment of semi-divine revelation, tells us of some aspect of this unseen, that he wins a place in human remembrance as a poet or a thinker.

On this emotional side you will also find art,—what the painter sees when he looks out upon the ever-changing ocean, what he reads to be the unchanging thing behind the world's change; the meaning of children's laughter in the meadows; the lessons of the furrows and wrinkles which Time, the old cynical ploughman, scores deep into the fairest faces of our fellowmen. And music, too, shewing us how the song of bird and burn, the clang and clash of human interests and aspirations, the cry of the wind in the trees, the ripple of the water running out among the reeds, the lamentations of the sea-birds where the currents meet, having passed through the heart of the musician, find expression for instrument and voice.

To understand this is to understand truly what culture means. Culture is knowledge gained not for its own sake, but for the sake of the refining of the mind and the sweetening of the world. To know by head-rote, and not by heart-rote, all the rules of politeness, would never make a man polite. To cultivate manners does not ensure the grace of manner. To make every penny a prisoner and shut up sovereigns in the chimney-corner is miserliness, not wealth. Knowledge is for loving use. It is the circulating coin of the soul, not to be kept in some kind of educational strong-room and only to be

shewn to strangers as bags of gold are exhibited to visitors in a bank. Culture is knowledge trained and used as a beautifying influence in life. It is the key of the House of the Interpreter. This is what Literature is engaged in expressing.

If you were able to sit down and put on paper the feeling of the autumn leaf, that falls like a golden thought in the woodlands, the spell of the moon behind the church spire, with the dark mass of the town, the trees, and the bridge, thrown deep down into the pool, —if you could fling, as it were, the whole picture into your own heart among your sorrows, your gladnesses, and your regrets, and then send it forth as singing words through the world, you would have written a poem which would carry your individual experience into sympathetic touch with the experiences of men everywhere. If, without copying leaf for leaf, cloud for cloud, and ripple for ripple, you can place that moonlight upon canvas, putting into the representation the emotions and the dreams which its exquisite stillness awakens within your soul, you will have painted a true picture, you will have touched hands with Art. It is not many that will be able to do this, even in a small degree. It is humiliating to remember how few in all the earth can do just what I have spoken of, though there are thousands trying to accomplish it. Now and again, some great heart, filled with light like the moon itself, walks in among the shadows, sings or paints perfectly something which embodies, clasps, and holds within it all human feelings, then, passing on, leaves his name behind him as a master. Such names become the shining jewels on the thread of the story of culture.

We will sit, as it were, over the winter fireside for a while, occasionally, and talk about the secret of Literature, how to discover it, how to use it, who were the great ones that flung it like a rare flower into the fields and

gardens of life. And we will endeavour to open windows in our poor homes, through which to look out into the pleasure-grounds and walking-places of poets and story-tellers, and see them there in their robes of wonder, as the imprisoned king of old saw, walking in an English garden, the lady whose beauty made captive his heart, and robbed him of all other thought until she was his bride.

CHAPTER III

LITERATURE AND RELIGION

LITERATURE, as an utterance of thought, differs from other phases of thought-utterance, in that it is the highest utterance of highest thought. Its matter is the best thought on the best things, and its expression is the best way in which such thought can be put forward in words. Now the highest things that affect the soul are loftier than food and raiment. The soul is spiritual, and deals with spiritual things, and the best side of the soul must be turned towards "the light that never was on sea or land," that is, the light whose radiance springs from the highest Being, whom we call God, the final Good, and the Source of all good in the universe. Literature, therefore, is the voice of that side of the soul which is turned towards this Supreme Spirit. When we say this, we mean that Literature, at its best, is the voice of religion.

The day was, when a statement like this might have been entirely misunderstood, when people thought of religion as meaning their own kind of religion, whatever that was; but religion is not outer ceremony or outer form, but the inmost aspiration, the tenderest feeling, and the noblest ideal of the holiest hearts. Cicero derived it from *relegere*, "to read over," pointing thus to the derivation of the spiritual as a revelation from

sibyllic books ; but others derive it better from *religare*, "to bind," which, in its first sense, might mean what binds a life together into one consistent whole of thought and conduct, giving the idea of obligation to higher law, and, in its later sense, what binds the spiritual nature of man to a supernatural personality, upon whom he feels dependent. Professor Flint's definition is the most comprehensive : "Religion is man's belief in a being or beings mightier than himself and inaccessible to his senses, but not indifferent to his sentiments and actions ; with the feelings and practices which flow from such belief."

Under the shadow of religion comes Piety, which has its source in the idea of the Fatherhood of God, and embraces the relations between parent and child. Its offspring is Pietism, which expresses a mystical personal contact with the Invisible. Devotion, also, in its wide sense of self-consecration, with godliness or God-likeness, the shaping of one's soul, in its relation to the events and circumstances of life, upon what we know of God and can learn of Him. Holiness, too, which is the transfusion of thought and being with the spirit of the Divine. Apart from these, as being of a more concrete nature, are Theology, which is the Science of Religion, and does not come into necessary connection with Literature ; and Morality, which is religion manifested in conduct.

Literature finds, in the fields of piety, devotion, and holiness a sphere and material for exercise. Thus, the utterance in the highest prose or in the passion and music of verse, of the love of God, the love of home, the love of wife and child, has enriched all writing with the thought of patriotism and domestic virtues ; while the others have given to Literature aspiration and vision, as in the pleadings of Augustine, the crystalline sentences of Thomas à Kempis, and the majesty of John Milton.

Whenever the soul hears with appreciation the voice of God in the universe, it feels the mystery of its own place in the divine order of things, and its remoteness from the far-off splendour, whose wings yet touch it; and it is filled with that unrest which impels it, by the way of aspiration and prayer, of dream and cry, to surpass its bounds and limitations. As Augustine himself says, "Our souls were made for Thee, O Lord, and they can find no rest until they rest in Thee."

Along the line of this quest, thought ever unwearyingly beats; and it is natural, therefore, that the very noblest lives, pushing out into the vast unknown, get that into their voice which gives to their expression a distinguishing tone. That is to say, the highest function of Literature is priest-like, seeking at the altar of faith for a revelation of God. At the same time it is prophet-like in the highest sense, for the prophet is a forth-teller, rather than a fore-teller. The best writers and best thinkers seek and find, and proclaim, in best words, the issue of their quest.

Hence not only thought, knowledge, and choice of word and phrase, but truth also, must have within them that love of the divine, which is steadfast above human drift and change, and luminous above the darkness and uncertainty of mortal affairs, the essence of religion in its widest and deepest interpretation. In this way, our greatest poets have been men who have brought nearest to the sorrows, needs, sin, darkness, and imperfection of humanity, all that is divine and superhuman. They have been, in the very best way, teachers of spiritual revelation. Even when, sometimes, in external conduct, not considered religious, they have been men of religion.

Religion gives a man up-look, and, therefore, out-look. The higher his gaze, the wider his vision. It gives the secret of the morning star, which God promises to him

who overcomes. Hence, though he sees the world full of individual failure, he is upheld by the assurance of universal victory. The lightning becomes his slave, to light his house, and turn the wheels of his most menial machinery. The sun becomes the measurer of his day, the steward of his labourers' wage-sheets.

Religion is always reminding man of his faculty of abstract thought, his kingship among creatures and things. Men may err, and their dreams and hopes be blown into nothingness as wind, but man prevails. A monarch of old kept close beside him on his throne his peasant shoes, to remind him of his humble origin, and to guard his heart against vain pride. But man always, even in his lowliest fields of labour, has the remembrance of highest potentialities, and the vision of a crown, in a world whose lights are but the shadows of the Divine light obscured by sin. This holds within it the secret of redemption, whereby he walks straight through crooked ways, and glad amongst so much that thwarts and overshadows. Through all this move self-denial, love, and self-sacrifice; and Literature not only tells the story of it, but inspires it, concentrates it, and, by burning word and shining phrase, imprints it deep upon the memory of man. Poetry especially is the agency of all that is most noble. As Shelley says, "Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world."

CHAPTER IV

THE PROBLEMS OF LITERATURE

THE question which dominates human life is that of sin or evil, with the moral and material entanglements which arise therefrom. From earliest times, thinkers have regarded pain and disaster which ensue upon surrender to evil, as having the sanction of some divine law. The Greek found the explanation in Nemesis, which was the manifestation of a curse tracking a family from crime to crime, to the giddy verge of absolute ruin. The consideration of those shadows that haunted great families whose stupendous sorrows formed the inexhaustible material of national story, was the staple of the Greek tragedians.

The Christian, however, found the sanction of duty in the will of God, obedience to which was rewarded with peace of mind and the eternal rapture of the soul hereafter, disobedience entailing the punishment of hell, which, being the punishment of an immortal soul, was also eternal.

The divine purpose, like a ray of sunshine, lies straight along human progress from eternity to eternity, but it gets crossed by dark lines and solemnising shadows, through sins of divers origin. There is direct and positive exercise of self-will; there is the weakness of hereditary taint; there is the "wobble" of unsteadiness stumbling out of the straight way; and the step aside through the blinding power of passion. Love, that, like

an angel all ashine with sweetness and with beauty, clothed in chastity, is the most precious comrade of the human heart, suddenly becomes, blinded through lust, a devastating fiend; while hearts that were pure get foul with shame, and feet that were snow-white get stained with mire. Or it may be that royal prerogative, abused, drags chaos about a nation. The desires we have yielded to, when confronted with the temptations of possessions, become gaunt selfishness, avarice with rapacious heart, and greed, crawling on its belly, among gold, to the heaven of its desire, missing, on its way, joy, love, and peace, and, at the end, losing both time and eternity, sometimes staining itself with the blood of murder, in the passing.

All these bring sorrow, disaster, punishment, and pain into the world. With these, the greatest masters of the human soul deal, seeing into the depths of the black abyss that is in the heart of man, often without beholding the reflection of a single star of hope therein. They, having vision which pierced through silk and satin, spangles and rags, and the very clay which clothed the soul, beheld the heart in its absolute nakedness, and saw the harlot in the palace, the Judas in the church, and the traitor on the throne. This doctrine of the naked soul, the spirit stripped nude before the stars, in order that it may have a chance, as St. Paul says, of being clothed anew with truth and beauty, is the strongest teaching of all those who, soaring upon eagle wings, have looked into the heaven from which men fall, and who, climbing down, with aching feet pierced by the thorns of life's *via dolorosa*, have looked into the hell into which men sink when they forget love's purity and the righteousness of God.

The noblest function of Literature in contact with that interpretation of life which is, in the highest sense,

religion, must therefore be to shew how terrible are the decrees of God, how wonderful His love, how mad the choice of evil in face of the opportunity for good, how God's hand works still amongst the broken strings for re-attunement, and, further, how the law of the best life is the law of climbing. When the soul is in the middle of a good fight towards the recovery of its footing on the ascending pathway, there are as many thorns in the way heavenwards as in the descent to hell ; but it is at the deepest depths of the blackest shaft that the stars are seen overhead, even at mid-day. Out of a soul's fight frequently springs a soul's flight higher.

The closer the appeal of Christianity approaches the spirit, the more eager is thought to enter the realm of the unseen. Powerfully and persistently are manifestations of nature taken as the alphabet of the super-sensuous. Shakespeare is full of this :

Look how the floor of heaven
Is thick inlaid with patines of bright gold :
There's not the smallest orb which thou behold'st
But in his motion like an angel sings,
Still quiring to the young-eyed cherubins ;
Such harmony is in immortal souls ;
But whilst this muddy vesture of decay
Doth grossly close it in, we cannot hear it.

The heart of man becomes thus an interpretative medium of the great unknown, as the shell, held to the ear of the little child, conveys the sonorous cadences of the distant sea. Thus, the stars become teachers through the medium of imagination.

Unaffrighted by the silence round them,
Undistracted by the sights they see,
These demand not that the things without them
Yield them love, amusement, sympathy.¹

¹ Arnold. "Self-Dependence."

The poet's interpretative imagination progresses, of course, with knowledge. Every discovery of science becomes an added link in the chain of wonder, and every new drop distilled in the vessel of wisdom gives a fresh taste and tang to the wine of life.

The poet, missing the clue, or coming to the end of it in his own day, may through imaginative power hint where the other end may be caught by the outstretched hand in the dark. Or, when the clue is found by him, he may point men to the sagging cord, and guide aspiration towards achievement of its purpose, stirring hope and faith that are dying, to a new step over the abyss.

Thus Browning cried :

The sum of all is, Yes, my doubt is great.
My faith's still greater,—thus my faith's enough.

In consequence of this, the characteristic of modern poetry is that in its expression the soul is poignantly conscious of advancement, even with its broken wing. The futility of life, the uncertainty of half-faith, the missing stone in the ford, the constant pressure of trouble and sorrow upon human weakness, find voice with such melancholy reiteration as

The weariness, the fever, and the fret
Here, where men sit and hear each other groan ;
Where palsy shakes a few sad, last grey hairs,
Where youth grows pale, and spectre-thin, and dies ;
Where but to think is to be full of sorrow
And leaden-eyed despairs ;
Where beauty cannot keep her lustrous eyes,
Or new love pine at them beyond to-morrow.

The same pain speaks through Arnold, when he touches upon

This strange disease of modern life,
With its sick hurry, its divided aim,
Its heads o'ertaxed, its palsied hearts.

Yet evermore does imagination gaze forward, and "faith
beyond the forms of faith" keeps the heart which believes
in itself, strongly beating.

CHAPTER V

MATTER AND STYLE

IN the drama of life we must have interludes, or the soul must die for very weariness. Were man not a dual creation, this requisite would have abundant satisfaction in bodily sleep; but there is above all, a spirit to be refreshed; and Literature meets the demand.

When the rapids are passed, the battle over, or the long march through the forest-depths, there is rest by the watchfire, for some sleep, for others perhaps a scanty meal of coarse flesh. But that is the hour for the rude bard. Then is he certain of an audience, "fit though few," while he recounts deeds of strong, wild passion, or anon, a tale of primitive sorrow that touches the hearts of the savage war-men. We can imagine the scene—the blue smoke curling up into the darkness, the log fire glinting on the scarred faces around the rugged rhapsodist, darkness outside the fringe of the firelight, and, over all, the great silent night, strewn with gold dust of stars!

To such scenes must we look for the source and fountain-head of Literature. Wave after wave of westward-driving conquest swept over the primeval world. The prior settlers fled to the mountains and wildernesses, or over-sea; but still, to-day, the old scraps of chant and legend, nursed and cherished in shelter-places of the

outcast tribes, linger on, and tell how men were stirred by struggle into utterance. They call up before us pictures of dead faces in the heather, of lonely folk in the moors and mountain-mists, brooding over their wrongs. We can imagine their minstrel singing,

Behold their watchfires in the vale !

Ours are those kingly hills, those silent glens.

Like hunted eagles are we driven to the crags.

Their path is over the hearts of our children.

Their footprints are red with our blood.

We can but linger here and weep, and pray for death.

Hence, we conclude that Literature primarily deals with special phases—epoch-making episodes in the history of souls and of nations. Intense interest always clusters around actors in a struggle, generalizing and combining striking features, and elevating great names to be key-stones and key-notes of eras. It is the full swing of a high tide that sets a signal bell clanging, and so, feeling, stirred by struggle, awakes thought-waves, which burst forth in utterances, cries, songs, safety-valves whereby the swaying passion finds relief. Thus do we find great thought-power struck into flame by great crises ; Literature, and especially poetical literature, the mirror of history, faithfully reflecting the life of the human soul ; every great author the offspring and mouth-piece of his times. It is, therefore, evident that Literature requires something of moment to say, something which is elevating and helpful ; and a way of saying it which may interest and catch attention. It must not only have thought ; it must have style.

The ancient rhetoricians spent their lives on works regarding the education and formation of an orator and writer. They detailed scores of figurative varieties of speech, and drew up lists of what they considered literary excellences. But not one of those treatises, though pro-

ductions of such care and earnestness and hope, could ever make an orator or an author. For, no matter what Cicero or Quintilian might write, in sentences that must ever remain classic and valuable while the art of speech-moulding exists, they could not hope to give it a universal personality ; in a word, all their labour ignored consideration of the varieties of the life and its necessities which lay at the root of all. They forgot the varied shape of the human soul, in their prescription of the form its utterance was to take in tangible words and phrases. It is astonishing how error lives and thrives. I open a book of pleasing essays, and here are some sentences culled at random from its pages :

“Style, after all, rather than thought, is the immortal thing in Literature . . . indefinable, yet all-subduing, just as fine manners are in social life. In reality it is not of so much consequence what you say, as how you say it. . . . I would rather be remembered by a song than a victory. I would rather build a fine sonnet than have built St. Paul’s. Fine phrases I value more than bank-notes. . . . To be occasionally quoted is the only fame I care for.”

This quotation is only one of many such that might be made, if life were not so brief and time so fleeting ; but it may stand as a type of its class. Let us see if it can be true.

It is a fact that the charm of style cannot be defined any more than the charm of fine manners in social life ; but neither of these is the heart of its special department. Style is not Literature, and manners are not at the root of social life. Further, a fine sonnet is not merely a woof of fine phrases, any more than a fine savour is a dinner ; nor is a poem quoted merely for its chime. Surely it is for the thought it has conveyed, for the feeling with which its lines, like fine harp-strings, have

throbbed, and which they have set vibrating in human hearts,—for the images of life and personality which it arouses in reader and listener. Language is the mere garment in which thought is clothed, the cloth of gold, or the rags that make the spiritual visible. Surely, it is not the language that lives, but what is in the language, giving form, sense, coherence, and pulsation to the words themselves! Indeed, thought may at times be said to be its own parent and its own offspring, though sometimes the language may be more forcible and striking than the thought. A commonplace, expressed in charming phraseology, by mere association stirs dreamy pleasant feelings in the soul; but these are evanescent as the witchery of summer clouds that tumble over into changing phantasy, and are lost in the blue deep of nothingness. There is nothing lasting, true, or great in them; you are entangled in a maze of lovely verbiage, and are not led, as you ought to have been, into the presence of the great unchanging truth of the universe.

The thought is the soul of the writing. It is the idea which shapes the expression and gives it power to march, and laugh, and weave its spell of wizardry. The writer's duty is not to give a display of metaphoric fireworks, but to impart something enlightening, elevating, ennobling for the needs of the world. This is against hasty blindfoldedness in writing. We must test our thought before we lift a pen or utter a word. The great and good will be all the grander and better for the ripening delay. The subject must be looked in the face; the scattered facts of life must be brought into unity, and all the thought-rays focused at the bar of judgment.

Further, the main thought or matter is subject to the ordinary laws of mind. The main thought comes down through the heights as a glacier comes, or as a river in flood comes, lifting in its progress much that lies

in its way, with which it really has often nothing to do. Precaution is, therefore, required against the incorporation of irrelevant details. This often springs from indistinct grasp of the subject. If the thought be indistinct, or imperfectly observed, the utterance must be likewise; the imagery will tend to be incoherent, and the whole construction loose. An ill-constructed sentence, like a badly-built bridge, needs many links and clamps, which do not tend to beautify the structure. On the other hand, around the central thought, as warriors around their chief in a battle, the whole array of minor thoughts should rally in compact, clear, and picturesque order. Hence, it is plain that the author is the servant of his message—poet-prophet and prophet-poet, in the truest sense of these words; for the prophet was in essence mainly a forth-teller, and the poet a creator. What he creates he must speak forth, else in both his offices his labour is in vain. Mouthpiece of the higher and greater, the spirit of his utterance leads him to the rostrum, and he must speak; but the spirit of truth, which is above it all, impels him to be true if he is to be useful.

The whole world, his own and other men's life, form the material for his thought. Wherever he may be, wherever he may go, he carries in him a chord which vibrates in sympathy with nature. Ever with him go the high heavens, the laugh of the rivulet, the wail of the wind, the hoarse, thought-breeding cry of the storm-blown deep. The sweet low music of nature, like the long-drawn sigh of a summer's day, is ever present in his soul. And the chance influences he encounters intensify all this—the joyous sport of children with sun-gleams in their curls; the lowing of cattle in the warm sunny meadows; the voices of loved ones; the joys and sorrows of the great crowds of men and women; the thought of the departed; the memories of long-past

gloomings. Age, too, hands down to age topics accumulated thus through time, and destined to be handed on to eternity, demanding and awakening contemplation, moving on with the ages, never finally to be shaken off on this side of the grave. These are not questions of fine phrases, or nicely-upholstered sentences; they are all born of deep, throbbing, lonely-brooding thought.

There are certain old writers, who seem to have outmarched their fellows of the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries, till they have fallen across the frontiers of the twentieth, still to march on through generations unnumbered, who are ever ready to form around them a charmed circle of readers. Now, when it comes to the opening of volumes by men of such bygone periods, it is evident that it cannot be the topics alone which attract us, for our century has, in methods of thought, and matter of life, shot ahead of the environment of the men of old, and left them and their speculations far in its wake. This quaint and simple charm may be truly said, I fancy, to arise, in part, from the personality of these authors, reflected through their language. The charm of this itself may spring largely from the antiquity in which they wrote, free from the speculations, inventions, and cares of our quick-marching age, which have in many ways changed our world, and, consequently, our language and our thought. Still, undoubtedly, there is an air of quaint and pleasant fancy over these writers; to this side or to that they lead us, according as topics invite, and often their by-paths are more delightful than the main road. We seem, too, to enjoy a heart-to-heart conversation with them, to be brought into touch with an old-world reality athrob with pulsing life. Hence, we truly say, "Style is the man," and not, "Style is the thought." Style is the personality, but yet, even with that, something more is required.

Thought is susceptible stuff. Whatever the structure of the individual mind, the thought will be moulded and coloured accordingly. No two individuals will handle the same topic alike. It will issue in a different form, and with different qualities, transmuted and transfused by the personality of the mind that has touched it in passing. Some hands smell of roses, and some of oil and clay ; what they handle takes their scent and taste. Into the whole world we each read our own personality ; to each of us all things are not similar in appeal ; but into every thought and every book, we read our own life and life-experience ; so closely and intimately are Literature and Life entangled and intertwined.

CHAPTER VI

STYLE AND THOUGHT

ALTHOUGH Style and Thought are not generally or necessarily identical, they yet depend upon the mind which calls them into being. Take the simplest and commonest examples, a house, a book, a river.

One man sees in a house but a stone-and-lime fabric, with windows to let light in, doors for human exits and entrances, and chimneys for smoke-escapes. Another is spell-bound by associations of memory. He hears strange voices wafted to him from the dingy windows. The rickety door is opened by tender fingers. There are faces that look into his as they pass. There are phantom feet that stir the silence of the moss-grown steps. In, over that worn threshold, bridal trains have danced. Within those lonely chambers men and women have been born, and have died. Now and again, out from those darkened rooms, the long black coffin has been borne clumsily, but lovingly, by rustic mourners.

A book, also, to some, ceases to be a mere collection of printed pages, and becomes a rallying-point for fancies and for memories. What eyes have glanced at its stained, time-frayed pages! What heads have bent lovingly above them! What tears have been wept over them! What fingers have met around those tattered boards! We are brought into contact with bygone

generations of human sorrow and joy ; and old, dead hands are clasped across the centuries in ours.

A river, too, may carry us away in thought to the bosom of the heaving ocean, to dream of golden argosies, dashing war-galleys, vikings, and sea-fights. In others, it may wake but a lightsome, lilting response to its musical babbling over its pebbly bed. Or to another, it will give sweet pictures of sunny reaches, of fields with their bleating flocks, of bosky banks, and green-woods, through the verge of which it flows.

Each, by his individual style, will captivate and enlighten his own class of readers ; some, indeed, may strike out to the relation between the finite and the eternal, and touch the mystery of human life itself.

No writer can, therefore, stand apart from the expression of his thought. While he is responsible for the thought as a father for his child, he must also study the form of it, just as a parent must consider the training and the clothing of his offspring. Doubtless there is, in some minds, a fine faculty of discernment, whereby they are enabled to pass by all that is mere accident, and to single out the striking and necessary framework of the subject. There is, further, in some, an innate capacity for word-fashioning. Language flows more freely from some than from others. It flows, too, in different ways, each making his own channel.

It is absurd to quibble as to whether a different style be requisite for different subjects. The utterance will all depend upon its author, his sympathy with the subject, and his point of view ; nay, we must sometimes descend to such considerations as even the state of the writer's digestion at the time.

Open a page of Milton ; is it not like opening a doorway which leads you straight into his presence ? You meet him face to face, and walk to and fro in

conversation with him; "a sound is in our ears as of a siren's song." Though three centuries of forgetful dust stretch between us and him, yet can he lay his spell upon us, and draw us after him, through stretches of polemic, dreary and wearisome enough, now, when the procession of the years has flattened all interest in much of it; yet with his own fine, eloquent personal talk in the breathing spaces, when the "sea of noises and hoarse disputes" has withdrawn its turmoil for a little, giving power to its pages.

For, not only is a book a key to the writer's mind; it is a key to the manners of a period or an era. No historical records give us such an intimate view of Roman society as does the graphic verse of Horace; and between the lines of William Dunbar, who has so much of the spirit of Horace about him, as well as through the poems of Lyndsay, we catch more profitable glimpses of Scottish contemporary history than we should from tomes of annals. Through the song of such singers, we catch many undertones of important movements. The ghost of their age is called up before us. In a few throbs of soul-music, whole life-dramas move past in state.

All that we get from our attempted analysis of this secret of the masters is, a strong sense of the truth and directness of their message, and of the appropriateness or propriety of its expression. Their work is marked by true *callida junctura*, like fine jewellery—thoughts that are real gems in a setting of pure gold. But, behind and beneath all, there is what evades the dissecting-knife, the personality of the thinker, surrounding, pervading, and unifying the whole.

This is what makes the air astir with whispers of the past. It is under this influence that the written or printed page brings back again the past, beneath whose spell chivalry revives, bugle and clarion ring, lances

crash and chargers fall, and shades long forgotten revisit these glimpses of the moon. Open a book of ballads,—how your heart is stirred with sighing and sorrow, aspiration and song. The present fades away, and over the far-stretching lowland moors with their black pools and peat-hags, you see the troopers ride on some wild foray, to lift a neighbour's cattle, or harry his tower. That passes, and, in lonely Skye, Prince Charlie leaves his corrie to creep for shelter to the peasant's hut. It is difficult to analyse the spell of an old book of song. Through the closed door there floats some nameless snatch wrung from a human heart long ago ; our fancies and our emotions are carried off at once in bondage. We are away to the hills ; we are children once again, on the rocks, in the caves, by the sea ; we hear voices we can never hear on earth, we see faces that are dust and ashes now, in every quarter of the world !

The universality of touch, the catholic sympathy, the humanness of experience are at the heart of the secret. If you think yourself a genius, and wish to die with illusion undispeled, banish from your presence Montaigne, Cervantes, Bacon, and him of Avon, for they shall undeceive you, and with that bluntness wherewith genius is wont to find expression. In them, as everybody knows, you find already, immortalized by the printer's art, all your own great and grand ideas. Montaigne, you would aver, has been eaves-dropping, with his ear to your heart. He has watched you from his quiet corner on your book-shelf, and caught and appropriated the thought which stirred your soul, or the spark of wit that made you smile and slap your thigh, as you mused in your easy-chair ; while Will of Avon, himself, high-browed and serene, has detected Montaigne in the theft, and, just to "lead him a dance," has embalmed the thought and the fancy in verse, which can only perish with the world of

men and women. But from this espionage and competition among the immortals, we read, through all their work, that Literature, which is the summit of man's development, is but the rest and recreation of the human mind, which eternally revolts against a bread-and-butter bondage. They saw that life grew tiresome, even to those who were most enamoured of it ; that clouds drifted over the sky ; that spots were on the face of the sun ; in fact, that life was not always the merry-go-round which fools and madmen think it to be ; and so they set their "make-believe" in motion. They sat behind the corner of the stage and pulled the strings, and made the world, with its wars and philosophies, dance and play for the amusement and instruction of men.

Thus the fancy moves, led by the nature of the subject and of the thinker ; and according to each of these is the style. Each soul has its own style. The thought may seem to be the father of the style, but both emanate from the same matrix ; both depend on ear and eye and the exercise of that finer spirit which is the undissectible essence of true writing. If we take up Thomas Carlyle, we find the vigorous, vivid, bitter, incisive nature of the Annandale man everywhere, his cries to his heroes, his creative reproduction of stirring scenes, his stern denunciations of the evils that try to hide from his censures. And he is not alone, in being himself.

A great writer lives according as he sounds the range of human feelings in his work. Hence, it is important to get at the heart of the subject, to dig into the main seam of thought, as Macaulay did, raking through old ballad stores for his material of first-hand knowledge from contemporary impressions.

Thought and style then, are both dependent on the

individual mind. From that mould are they shapen, and regarding that, we can lay down no hard-and-fast rules. For great literature truly arises from individual struggle. The soul felt the narrowness of the limits which cribbed and confined it. It sought to stretch its pinions, and soar to the zenith, to pluck out the secrets of the universe. Poor captive ! it is true that, at its best, it can but beat its weary wings against the prison till it die ; yet the fluttering pinions throb a music of their own.

What alone gives immortality, to style and thought alike, is truth. The poor lay-brother, Long Will, hugging his indignant sorrow to his bosom as he strode through bustling Cornhill, the wayward boy of Avon seeking his fortune in London town, the Ayrshire ploughman singing amid his furrows, are as never-fading constellations in the literary firmament, because they struggled and toiled for truth, and gave true utterance to their struggle. Flinging their immortal words across the abyss of time, they fell and died, and posterity preserves their memory for ever. The thought produced the thinker ; the thinker produced the style. Thinker, thought, and style were blended in indissoluble, mysterious, and eternal unity, the secret of which, like the secret of life itself, evades for ever the knife that searches for it.

CHAPTER VII

VOCABULARY

THOUGHT-STUFF is the great thing in all writing. Unless a man have something to say which shall have sprung out of the feeling of his heart, and unless he have thought it all out clearly so that it shall touch the feelings of the hearts of others, it were much better that he should keep silent. There is no call upon him to write or speak unless he have a message in regard to duty, love, joy, or sorrow. All the beautiful words he can ever write must mean so little, apart from thought, that it will neither be worth his trouble to write, nor the trouble of any other person to read what he has written. But, if a man have tasted life's experiences, and learned the meaning and the purpose of the world, everything he says, if he say it as he has felt it, will be of importance to all around. He will say it in his own way. The water of a stream takes on the colour and the taste of the soil through which it flows ; so, thought is of the same shape and the same colour as the heart from which it sprang, and the experience which gave rise to it.

A man of forcible strong character thinks strong thoughts forcibly. A man of weak, shrinking nature, thinks stammeringly ; while he whose soul is like a fine-strung instrument thinks musically, and with magic of

utterance, as when the night echoes the long-drawn whisper of the waves along the strand.

Now, each man's method of clothing his experience in the embodiment of speech, is what is spoken of as his style. Every man, who gives utterance to thought in his own way, has this gift which is called style. The word itself comes from the Latin for "a pen." And most aptly so, for there is always a certain amount of a person's character revealed by his handwriting. A flabby nature writes flabbily. A pen is the blade of thought. Any man who means to fight manfully in an earnest quarrel uses his weapon in his own way, grips his sword firmly, and strongly; and each stroke that he makes has the mark of purpose within it. So with him who intends to write purposefully. His ideas marshal themselves. His words stand shoulder to shoulder like warriors on a battle ridge. For they are soldiers of thought and utterance. They have to fight for their author; and according as the march of them moves with strength and beauty is his battle fought and won.

The thinker chooses his words to suit his thought, just as a general chooses soldiers for his fight. A man does not walk blindly into a barrack-room, or into a camp, and take the first ten men he meets, if he have for them a purpose more than trivial. He has noted marks of fearlessness—the shining eye, the steady lip, the strong hands, the deep-beating heart. He calls them to him accordingly. So is it with words and phrases. He carefully watches, learns, notes, and understands; till, at the summons, his ideas come, carrying into the field their forces with them. A man's style is thus a habit which has arisen from steady and deliberate choice.

It does not follow that, in writing, it will be the same as in speech. Words which are used in conversation are

not so beautiful in form, nor so steady and regular in the line of their parade, as those which are used on the written page. When a man writes down his message, he means to give it an abiding power, and a far-reaching influence. He, therefore, tries to make his message beautiful in expression, clear in arrangement, and of value in its meaning. He chooses, from the words that are in every day's speech, all that is best. He searches out from amongst the words, heaped together, of former days—words that may have grown old, words that are perhaps forgotten, passed by in the hurry of to-day; or words which have been laid aside, because the edges of them have been broken down like the edges of old pitchers, which too many lips have used, so that they do not seem to carry what they once did, and certainly not to hold the feelings and meanings which they formerly conveyed.

Many words, in this way, lose their value. They are used so often that they get worn thin, as a coin which goes round and round for generations till the King's head and the note of value are rubbed off from the face of it. Sometimes such words as "terrible," "glorious," "awful," fall into this class, till they lose their great splendour, and their best meanings, and become cheap, and ring so light on the counter of truth that they seem even to be false, and are flung aside. When words get rubbed down in this way, another Latin word covers them, and that is "trite." A man cultivating a good style, especially in writing, avoids the trite in vocabulary.

Sometimes a writer becomes fastidious, over-particular, pedantic, priggish. His words then, instead of being a serviceable row of disciplined soldiers, take on an appearance as of dandies in stays, going out to fight the great battle of Armageddon with court swords and ornamental hat-pins.

The *stylus*, or Latin pen, was a sharp instrument of iron, and could be used sometimes as a serious weapon, suggesting, indeed, to later ages, the convenient little dagger which was carried at the belt, and so gave to the assassins of Italy the word "stiletto." Thus, somehow, style suggests to us point, power, piercingness, edge, whetted upon the words that convey the thought.

Sometimes, as we saw, great and splendid words, which served noble writers and thinkers in the past to express most sublime thoughts, are, by the way of triteness, degraded to the very commonest service, as archangels or heroes might become slaves and water-carriers. At the same time, by an opposite process, words that are of the most common daily use, spoken by little children on the pavements, by common people in the closes, in the harvest-fields, and farm-houses, and in sheep-folds, become ennobled, uplifted, and enriched, as if a daisy or a buttercup were transplanted into a king's garden and reckoned a king's flower, as if the elixir of life were put into and sealed in a dish of common clay, which thereafter finds place among earth's most valued treasures. Perhaps, the most notable example of this in all literature, is Christ's enriching of such words as the Greek word for "humble," which meant, before His day, low and mean. Aristotle, the greatest of the heathen moralists, spoke coldly of meekness, the correlative of humility, as a "mean inclining to a defect."¹ Christ found the word lying in the mire, despised and forgotten. He breathed on it, and the "low" became the "lowly," as if a lily had grown in the heel-print of a beggar-man.

¹ *Ethics*, Book iv. chap. vii.

CHAPTER VIII

THE THINKER AND HIS MESSAGE

ALTHOUGH words are not themselves the really important things in Literature, yet no writing can ever claim for itself the right to be considered Literature, unless its words have been carefully weighed, and each been filled with the clear absolute truth, and draped in beauty. Nevertheless, in the matter of literary value, truth is more important than beauty. The power of an army and the strength of it in any struggle against wrong, do not lie in the exquisiteness of its uniform, the harmony of its band, the correctness of its pipers' piping, or the accuracy of its marchers keeping step to the music. Rather are these rooted in the honour which is burning in the hearts of the leaders, and the indomitable courage that beats in the breasts of its men. So, Literature which is deficient in truth, which has not in its every line and every sentence the ring as of steel tried and found true, must ever be inferior in value to the most imperfect cry, the most broken-voiced phrase conveying the indignation and resolve of one brave heart to another.

Hence, not only must the writer, or the speaker, if he be resolved to touch the fringe of Literature, have a message, but it must be a true message. The more deeply it penetrates to the fundamental primal fact,

which is behind the drift and change of dying things, the more of eternity will be within it, and the more effective will be its action in awakening and stirring the noblest life of humanity.

Yet, Literature is not always a pioneer. Indeed, it is a fact that often, when a people have lain on their faces crushed with wrong, literature has been silent. It has its gaze not so much, nor so frequently, upon To-day, as upon the days which, with faces veiled, await beyond To-morrow. Journalism, political pamphleteering, the mere militia, guerrilla troops, and rugged pikemen of Literature, deal most frequently with the passion and the struggle of the present hour. Yet, Literature itself recognizes an eternal duty on behalf of truth wronged, and on behalf also of those who have righted her, by embalming in deathless utterance the sorrows of the struggling brave that have not been afraid to die for liberty, duty, and honour; and also in writing for ever and ever on the memory of the ages the horribleness of evil, and the selfish oppressions of man.

Thus, when, in later days, humanity is inclined to forget, when shame has lost her blushes, when greed has forgotten the stings across her shoulder laid on her by the lash of righteous indignation,—when these are inclined to lift their heads again and fight for a footing in the world's history, the verse of the poet, perhaps forgotten, the message that started out of a heart indignant, runs like a stream, vocal, which breaks from the desert rock; and brave men drink again refreshing draughts, and stand up for God and humanity once more.

That especially is the function of the poet. He makes us drop the accidentals. He invokes the universal, like a ghost, out of the grave. We shut our eyes to the fact of the guillotine and the dripping blood,

that never was meant to stain the white garment of Liberty, when men began, as if with eyes fresh-opened upon a new world, to dream of the day of oppression being ended. We hear, and shall always listen for, the marching feet of the men who left Marseilles, knowing how to die, and contented with that knowledge. We hear them sweeping up through the villages and towns that lay between Marseilles and Paris; while, more inspiring than any banner, more awakening than any drum-beat or call of bugle, flutters above and before them the wild hymn of the *Marseillaise* :—

O liberty can man resign thee
Once having felt thy generous flame?
Can dungeons, bolts or bars confine thee,
Or cords thy noble spirit tame?

To arms, ye brave!
The avenging sword unsheath.
March on,
To victory or death.

Even a slave, hearing that, would turn in his chains, and be for a little ere he fell, a man again, free.

The awakening function of Literature, of poesy, of psalm,—how it makes hypocrisy squirm! How it makes the tyrant tremble on his throne, till the trembling stirs the most obsequious to something like manliness!

Now, it is the possession, or the lack, of this red-hot humanness that makes a poet live in the memory of man, or wither out of history. Laurence Minot, Barbour the old Scottish Archdeacon, Blind Harry who keeps the name of Wallace still vocal in Scottish fields, Burns especially, above all men, possessed this indignation secret, with which, as if with a stone in a strong man's hand, they broke the windows of the proud, and beat on doors behind which men were sleeping, until they woke

the whole wide world to run forth and see God passing up the streets, with Freedom in His train.

It is this which makes all the difference between the cold chronicler, peering, with his eye-glass at his musty nose, amongst dry documents, rent rolls, and bailiffs' recording books, until he sets up his dusty dead men, one after the other in solemn row, like things in wax-work, putting a label on their lifeless bosoms, calling it history,—and such an historian as Carlyle himself, who sets running across his page, with an impulse which drags you running with them, the mob, with pike and musket or staff, to beat down the Bastille's cruel walls, and to let in light where darkness and pain had been since beyond the memory of man. That is why those who wish to know how men and women lived and fought in the days that are past, in the crises of crushing tragedies and the toppledom of mighty epochs, would rather hear one human shout from a printed page, than read twenty-four coldly-printed errorless duplications of dust-covered charters.

Hence, we see the entrance into the question of Literature of a third great influence, namely, the personality of the thinker or the singer. The message is much, the word which is the missile of the message is a great deal, but the heart of a man, which is the quarry of thought, is the biggest element of it all. In that deep well lies the secret of immortality in Literature. The men of heart, who can be stirred as individuals by a general wrong, are the men who hold the ages. The utterance of your cold philosophers who, in their drowsy periods, discourse with monotonous regularity on the immortal themes, moves the marching multitudes as little as the clock bell in the tower, which may strike even twelve without anybody hearing a single stroke of it, so accustomed are they to its slumbrous sound; but

the one strong heart, suddenly ringing out its awakening note, its startling message, stormily, away, perhaps, from the regulations of the grammarian, makes whole crowds turn right about, and forget markets, buyings and sellings, gathering and gain, working and sleeping. It breaks into the drowse of the age, like a fire bell through the darkness, forcing the busy feet to stay, and the beating heart to hush. It may be unfashionable for kings' courtiers to unbend, and journalists to yield to enthusiasm ; but all forget fashion before one burning word, as all the sparrows cease their twittering when the thunder rolls across the sky.

CHAPTER IX

POETRY AND PROSE

THE common idea is that literary writing is divided up arbitrarily into two sections, namely, poetry and prose, and the man in the street thinks that the difference is simply the difference of form,—that every bit of verse is poetry, and what is not written in verse is prose. The hasty judgment of the ignorant sees in this matter no difference between

Affliction sore
Long time he bore,
Physicians were in vain,

and

We watched her breathing through the night,
Her breathing soft and low.

Its ears are shut to the appeal of atmosphere and feeling. It cannot appreciate the intensity of living words as vehicles of living thought. It is to it as though all clay vessels on a shelf were of the same value, the butler giving no consideration to the vintage they contained. This was very frequently the standard of the eighteenth century, Wordsworth himself speaking of the achievement of the poet as "the accomplishment of verse," and sometimes he attached more importance to form than to the content of it. In a footnote to his famous Preface to the second edition of *Lyrical Ballads*, he says: "I

here use the word 'Poetry' (though against my own judgment) as opposed to the word 'Prose' and synonymous with metrical composition . . . instead of the more philosophical one of Poetry and Matter of Fact, or Science. The only strict antithesis to Prose is Metre ; and this is not, in truth, a *strict* antithesis."

Definitions of poetry have been flung off from critical and uncritical minds in the heat of energy or in the cool of it, expressing only the opinion of an individual, or of his age. They have revolved around the question as to whether poetry was simply to be found in the emotion of the utterance, or in the artistic form of its expression,—is poetry purely spiritual, or can it be material? Aristotle himself says, in his *Rhetoric*, that if a sentence have metre it will be poetry ; yet, in his *Poetics*, he goes right in the teeth of this dictum, and asserts that a poem is not a poem merely because of its metrical form. He obviously is speaking, in the former case, in a popular way ; and, in the latter, is extending the meaning of the word "Poet" so as to include any one writing in form of prose, whose work yet falls within the field of idealistic imitation, and so enters the sphere of art.

The same question, as to whether metre is in any way required for poetic utterance, has been dealt with by Sir Philip Sidney, and by Shelley, and Wordsworth. Amongst many others, these three decided that metre is not required for poetic expression. Sidney looks upon verse simply as though it were the decorative garment of poesy, holding that "One may be a poet without versing, and a versifier without poetry." Clothes do not make the gentleman ; and rhyme does not make the poet. Shelley says : "The distinction between poets and prose writers is a vulgar error. Plato was essentially a poet—the truth and splendour of his imagery, and the melody of his language are the most intense that it

is possible to conceive. . . . Lord Bacon was a poet. His language was a sweet and majestic rhythm, which satisfies the sense, no less than the almost superhuman wisdom of his philosophy satisfies the intellect." Wordsworth also combats the common opinion that verse and rhyme are necessary accompaniments of poetry. Recognition, however, of such a phenomenon in literary expression as a "prose poet," occurs as far back as 1564, in Minturno's treatise on the Poetic Art, very probably for the first time. Ben Jonson says: "A Poet is that which by the Greeks is called . . . a maker. . . . Hence he is called a Poet, not he which writeth in measure only."

The highest and noblest conception is that of John Milton, who holds that "he who would not be frustrate of his hope to write well hereafter in laudable things, ought himself to be a true poem; that is, a composition and patterne of the best and honourablest things; not presuming to sing high praises of heroic men or famous cities, unless he have in himself the experience and practice of all that which is praiseworthy." Shelley falls in with this idea when he says: "Poetry is the record of the best and happiest moments of the happiest and best minds." He finely says: "It is, as it were, the interpenetration of a diviner nature through our own."

In the eighteenth century, it was the matter or teaching of verse that gave its character to poetry. Thus Goldsmith calls her the

Nurse of every virtue.

Wordsworth probably understood more than all others what a poet really was. "A man speaking to men . . . endowed with more lively sensibility, more enthusiasm and tenderness, who has a greater knowledge of human

nature, and a more comprehensive soul, than are supposed to be common among mankind . . . a disposition to be affected more than other men by absent things, as if they were present." This is in line with Shakespeare's

Imagination bodies forth
The forms of things unknown.

What is involved is, in fact, the difference between the science and the art of language as a spiritual manifestation. The art of poetry is the art of draping the invisible soul of the poetic in tangible and visible form. There is, of course, no art of imagining. It is when imagination, moving to the rhythm of the music of the spheres, becomes embodied in verbal shape, that it takes form in words and syllables which please the ear and entrance the eye. And this is where the skill of the word-craftsman enters, though metre and melody, while not in the truest sense essential, yet come together with poetic thought and feeling into the world, at their birth. For poetic expression to be deficient in these, is to fall short of its charm, and to fail in its appeal to the sense of pleasure. Yet, poetry is not sound or music only, any more than, in ordinary language, vowels alone could express a conversation.

Perhaps, the first real difference between prose and poetic utterance is, that the thought comes rhythmically. No true poet has any need to sit down and heat up cold material, in order to spend his days hammering and twisting it into musical shape. Yet, of course, self-criticism and the discipline of revisal must ensue ere the most excellent verse can bear the judgment of the world. The first element of poetry is lyrical swing; the muse dances out into the realm of utterance with wave-beats of melody, whose ictus gives most frequently certain elements of form. Thus, in rhythm, alliteration is a

spontaneously natural concomitant. It is as if an open hand gave reiterated direction to sound-waves. Certainly, no modern poet, who knew his function, and was worthy of the name, ever sat down and made elaborate fantasias on the letter "f" or "d" or "r," as you would think from some so-called critical writings he was in the habit of doing. The true prophet "endured, as seeing Him who is invisible"; the true poet works as hearing the voice of the unseen. Hence, the thoughts come, carrying their own clash and music with them.

CHAPTER X

POETRY

THE difficulty which haunts all writers on poetry, as to its distinction from prose, arises mostly from the fact, which we have already noted, that by some it has been considered to be merely a question of *form*, while by others the test is its *content*. To a Frenchman, it might seem natural to consider even an article of criticism a poem. With him, colour, atmosphere, beauty of phrase, give the uplifting difference.

Wordsworth's distinction of poetry from science, as being the only real contrast, is nearest actuality; for poetry is not only the imaginative view of truth, but it is truth, permeated and clothed with imagination. This statement hanks itself most closely on to the inner meaning of the word itself. A poet is a creator. Dunbar and the Scottish minstrels called themselves, and were called, in this way, "makkars." Inventiveness is the fundamental test. With Plato and Aristotle and their followers, inventive imitativeness was what made poetry. Bacon, in the third book of his *Advancement of Learning*, treats form itself as not of much account, but looks upon poetry as a kind of "romantic fiction."

Of course, both in Matthew Arnold's idea of poetry as "a criticism of life," and in Wordsworth's "emotion recollected in tranquillity," along with the imaginative

imbuing of the external universe with our own feelings, it is really the subject or material of poetry that is dealt with, and not poetry as an art. In this last detail, Hegel held that metre is the first and only condition absolutely demanded ; that it is, in fact, only poetic form which essentially marks off poetry from ordinary prose.

Coleridge expressed in aphorism something that touches the truth, when he said that prose was " words in their best order," but poetry " the best words in the best order " ; and yet, he fell short of truth, for good prose, too, must always have the best words suitable to the topic with which it deals. What he meant was, that poetry dealt with the kingliest truths, and utterance should be in its court dress for the occasion. The vocabulary of poetry is loftier, nobler, richer, and charged with higher music than the vocabulary of prose. That is what Matthew Arnold meant when he spoke of the " grand style " of poetic phrase.

Aristotle's root idea of poetry was its identity with fiction. He said the poet did not tell what really happened, but what could happen. It was the possible, not the actual, that interested him. The difference, therefore, between history and poetry, was not merely the possession of metre by the one, and the absence of it from the other, for, even if the work of Herodotus were put into metre, it would still be history. Hence, poetry has a wider truth than history, and a higher aim ; for poetry deals with the universal, history with the particular.

Plato, on the other hand, brought something like a charge of unreality against poetry. " An impossibility which is credible is to be preferred to a possibility which is not believed." Yet, he admits that the poetic art is high and noble, because the type has always more of perfection

about it than the individual. And again, he alleges against poetry that the emotional side of human nature is fostered by it, to the neglect and hurt of reason. Aristotle meets this with his famous statement, that by the feeling excited through the representation of a truth, the excess of emotion is carried off, and the emotional system relieved, as by a moral purge, to the benefit and not to the hurt of man. His *Poetics*, however, deals with poetry as being practically the same as the Tragic Drama, which was, of course, the great poetic manifestation that dominated the life of the Greek states. This shews the difference between ancient and modern criticism; for what the ancients looked at was *form*; what the modern searches for in a creation is "the finer spirit of all knowledge."

It was after the Renaissance, when, as has been beautifully said by Michelet, "man found himself," that, finding himself, man made his own emotions and intellect the test and measure of the spirit of wonder which filled the literature of Greece and Rome, then opened to him by the dispersal through Europe of the scholars and scholarly literature from Constantinople, through the capture of that city by the Turks in 1453. Through the Middle Ages, Aristotelian ideas were the only standards, and they were the foundations upon which modern criticism was reared.

Bacon it was who, in his *Advancement of Learning*, stretched his hand forward into the future, and wrote on the first page of modern thought the true beginnings of criticism.¹ He recognized in poetry a special order of thought, consistent with the spiritual aspirations of man, and consistent also with his spiritual growth.

Addison was the next great creator of constructive criticism. He set aside mere consideration of form as

¹ *Advancement of Learning*, Book 2, iv. 1 and 2.

being the final thing, and did not hesitate to use new elements of human knowledge as they appealed to him. He created a new idea of a critic, objecting to criticism turning "wholly upon little faults and errors." "A true critic," said he, "ought to dwell rather upon excellences than imperfections, to discover the concealed beauties of a writer, and commend to the world such things as are worth their observation."¹ This standard made modern literature possible, for it gave the opportunity of liberation from ancient and received standards of form. In his criticism of *Paradise Lost*, to which he gives eighteen papers, his power as a critic and as a creator of modern criticism lies in his pointing out "particular beauties," and determining "wherein they consist."

"Poetic justice," the reconciling of the ways of God and man, is also a modern idea, and expresses the difference between ancient and modern literature. Bacon stated it, when he said that the use of feigning in history or poetry is "to give some shadow of satisfaction to the mind of man, in those points wherein the nature of things doth deny it." Poetic justice means "Modification of justice by constructions of art."² It is this truth which gives a moral to writing. As Addison says, "I am, however, of opinion that no just heroic poem ever was or can be made, from whence one great moral may not be deduced. That which reigns in Milton is the most useful and the most universal that may be imagined. It is, in short, this, that obedience to the will of God makes men happy, and that disobedience makes them miserable."

Further, Addison's work settled it as a fact of modern criticism, that poetry appealed, in the prime instance, to

¹ *Spectator*, No. 291.

² Moulton's *Shakespeare as a Dramatic Artist*.

the imagination. In connexion with this, Lessing, the German critic, showed in his *Laokoon*, in 1766, how sculpture and painting differed from poetry. He says that the beauty of work in those spheres of art is revealed to us, "not by our eye, but by the imagination through the eye," whereas in poetry the appeal is entirely to the imagination, and not to the senses. The question between them is not which is the greater, but which is the truer, in being the higher, and nearer the universal fact. Sculpture and painting can only seize upon one vital moment, whereas poetry deals with a whole experience of the soul.

Matthew Arnold tried to bring all life to the side-by-side test of the ideal. He was the apostle of culture; and culture was the search after perfection. Its highest attainment was the ability to see things as they really are, getting to know the best that has been thought and said in the world, and using them as the source of a quickening stream, whereby our mechanical estimates should be freshened and transfigured. With him, culture is criticism in its highest sense. He comes to the banquet of English literature bearing, in either hand, the fruits he has gathered in the gardens of ancient Greece and modern France and Germany. He feels the advance of imagination delayed by modern attainments in science. His own time is "wanting in grandeur." "The present has to make its own poetry." His test is that "high seriousness" which belongs to Homer and Sophocles, and which he finds also in Dante, Shakespeare, and Milton. This is the "mark of supreme poetic effort."

It was, however, notably striking that, in this very age of railways, business, and fortune-making, a great literature was growing up, which was to find noble utterance from the hearts of Tennyson, Browning, Rossetti, Swinburne, and Morris.

Aristotle's test was symmetry, form. Addison added, and even put in the place of that, thought, the spirit of utterance, the soul rather than its clothes. Arnold applied this principle, but said: "Poetry interprets, by expressing, with inspired conviction, the ideas and emotions of the inward world of man's moral and spiritual nature. . . . More and more, mankind will discover that we have to turn to poetry to interpret life for us, to console us, and to sustain us." Briefly, Arnold traces in creative literature the personality of the writer, and the thought, complexion, and atmosphere of the age. "For the creation of a master-work of literature two powers must concur, the power of the man, and the power of the moment." It is an interesting line of study to note, through the literature of the ages, where one or the other of these is absent, and where both combine. Poetic thought can be expressed either in prose or verse. Poetry is a criticism of life; and it is characterized by "its interpretative power," and its supreme merit is the "high seriousness of absolute sincerity."

The strength of the great English poets lay in that they answered the question how to live. Without poetry, science, religion, and philosophy are incomplete. Mrs. Browning, in "Aurora Leigh," puts it thus:

The truth which draws
Through all things upwards—that a twofold world
Must go to a perfect cosmos. Natural things
And spiritual—who separates those two
In art, in morals, or the social drift,
Tears up the bond of nature and brings death,
Paints futile pictures, writes unreal verse,
Leads vulgar days, deals ignorantly with men,
Is wrong, in short, at all points.

Poetry is, in fact, greater than science because it interprets life, whereas science only formulates facts.

Wordsworth himself, after saying that the poet must express himself as other men express themselves, shews that he wrote in verse because he has restricted himself to the subjects in poetry, which are "the great and universal passions of men, the most general and interesting of his actions, and the entire world of nature."

The Poet thus differs from the mere psychologist, from the compiler of a *catalogue raisonné* of an employment bureau; and from a mere physical philosopher, by seeing things through a vision suffused by interpretative imagination, having "natural magic" and "moral profundity," combined with "the splendid and imperishable excellence of sincerity and strength."

CHAPTER XI

THE WRITER AND HIS AGE

A MAN, when making instruments of any kind, cannot do otherwise than use the resources of the period he is living in. Before he knows of the existence of metals and the way to work them, he must be content with stone and flint—poor imperfect things, yet wonderful for the ingenuity they provoke within him—to protect his own life from his foe, and to provide food for his necessities. The moment, however, he discovers how to make a dagger or an axe out of metal, he has stepped into an entirely new epoch. Man is, therefore, both the creation and the creator of his environment. What he is surrounded by, influences his habits and his thoughts, while, at the same time, he takes these and makes something new out of them.

So the thinker, and especially the poet, is the child of the age he is living in ; but he is also the creator of the age that follows him. The poet's soul is kindled into emotion, and stirred into utterance by his environment, by the struggle, perhaps, of his countrymen for liberty against oppression or invasion, by the aspirations after nobler life and freer effort. Or he may become the mouthpiece of the dissatisfaction of his age with old formulas of political or religious creeds which satisfied the past, but which in his day may be found not to be

fresh enough, beautiful enough, large enough—perhaps, even, not to have any utility within them. Or it may be that, born into a generation which has lost entirely the faith that moulded his nation in the past, the poet may be impelled to weave into lofty verse, breathing regret, and clothed with the majesty of the vanished past, the story of the days that are dead, the hopes and dreams of the noble and the brave.

Thus, for example, Greece held liberty as the most sacred heritage of man. To be bound under a foreign yoke, to have people who spoke alien tongues masters of her states and towns, was to her a dream of horror. The Persians, with their myriads of marching men, their armies gathered out of innumerable Eastern nations, their vast flotillas crowded with warriors, came westwards, like a rolling ocean-tide, to overwhelm Greece. The Grecian states and towns forgot their jealousies of one another, their multiform causes of petty quarrel; and, with a unity of purpose and a devotedness of political resolution such as the world has never seen surpassed, faced fearlessly the opposing foe, and at Marathon and Salamis flung back the invading hosts that came to put Greece into bonds.

Out of the two vast attempts, of which these were the battle-checks, sprang undoubtedly the great poetic manifestation of the Greek interpretation of life, the thought of doom, and the purpose of the gods, which we find in the works of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides.

Aeschylus was a warrior and fought at Salamis. He saw the courage of his countrymen break and scatter into ruin the fleets of their enemies; and, when the battle was over, the manly courage that was in his own heart welled forth in poetic utterance. Sophocles was but a youth at the time; and, when the chorus of boys sang songs of praise to the Greeks and to the gods for

the victory and vindication of liberty, he led them in their song. That very day, in the island whither the women had fled for security, Euripides, whose name is the third in the line of Greek poetic greatness, was lying, a little child, in the lap of his mother.

Thus three epochs touched hands. The struggle and clash of the conflict for freedom against invasion gave Greece its provocation for majestic poetry. These three men, each according as they read the message of heaven in the changing lines of their age, gave their interpretation of the purpose of the gods with men, shewing the terrible disastrousness of human ambition yielded to, of human greed deified, and human passions allowed to grow up until they mastered all the noblest impulses of the soul.

In the same way, in our own land, the struggle for freedom of thought in the matter of religion, and the struggle for right of way across the waves, combined with the fight against invasion by the Spanish Armada, woke thought from her bondage and her slumber, kindled patriotism, and sent a new power of nationality adrift upon the ocean, following all stars of promise, after new discovery and new advantage. Imagination saw the lightnings of portent, heard the thunders of doom. Men came back with travellers' tales, and spoke of islands swooning in the glamour of sun-smit seas, of strange races in strange places, and of blood-stirring fights upon the water and the land. So the Elizabethan period became an age crying, through song and through dream, new things of hope and defiance, of manhood that was not afraid to die, of the doom of human hate, of the ruin of human pride, of the horror of human sin. These awakened the spirit of tragedy that had fallen asleep by Grecian shores. Marlowe and the band of vagabond scholars whose hearts were full of song and laughter,

dying young, prepared the way for the great ocean-like soul of Shakespeare, ocean-like because his imagination bears across its tides argosies, navies; dreams of hope that glowed through darkness till the full dawn came, despairs that go down in the night; dead men adrift in the deep of tragic sorrow and ruin.

So, too, in the eighteenth century, from the influence of artificial thinkers in France, tying little tags of rules about the wings of poetry, hobbling the legs of the muse until she limped like a tinker's horse in the village meadow, arose what was curiously called by Johnson "the Metaphysical School" of poets, culminating in the glitter of Pope and Addison. But Wordsworth heard the beat of nature's heart, and learned that logic-mincing and phrase-chopping, through which you bound your thoughts in verse-parcels, even though tied about with golden strings and jingling bells, could never touch the soul. Then, in a time when much was passing away before the march of modern invention and education, when old feudal loyalties were perishing, and old habits vanishing, Scott and Byron turned men back in thought to the ages of romance. The lawyer in his office, and the merchant on his stool, felt themselves riding alongside the armour-clad knights of chivalry; and the generation that listened for the news of Waterloo was stirred to do all and to endure by the remembrance of the clash of steel, and the crash of lances on knightly fields of conflict long ago.

You will see, thus, how much the poet is provoked into utterance by his own age and environment; and, at the same time, how he uses this provocation to point men to the future, and to turn them back, if need be, to the past. Sometimes, it is good to lead folk that have been in the dark and overcrowded streets, up the hill-side to some quiet moorland well, where stand the

crumbling walls of bygone generations who loved to drink of the limpid waters which kept the thoughts and emotions of their fathers pure. So the Romantic writers gave a new view, from old standpoints, to their age, which was becoming prosy, selfish, matter-of-fact, deaf and blind to everything but the present opportunity.

CHAPTER XII

POETIC FORM

METRE and verse being so characteristic of poetic form, it is well that a brief consideration should, in passing, be given to these. The oldest form of English verse is "alliterative," the scheme being the formation of rhythm by the impulse of recurrence of the same letter in a line or a couple of lines.

Much that has been written about alliteration is entirely beside the mark. Alliteration occurs at the tremulous crossing and re-crossing of the waves of feeling.

The horn of the hunter is heard on the hill,

undoubtedly came into being with the alliterative impulse helping its birth. It is far more natural to melodious utterance than any other form.

Poetry must bear evidence of the creative emotion ; it must have rhythm and movement, and it must have æsthetic expression. The most beautiful thought, expressing the most deep-stirred feelings, if clothed in poor words, must suffer. Apollo in a diver's dress is beauty thrown away ; Venus in a hobble skirt would not appeal to Olympus.

Alliteration, or "head-rhyme," is not now necessarily a part of poetic composition, and is only legitimate

when used by the avenues of natural expression ; but, in Early English poetry, following the tradition of its Gothic origin, it was essential, and was indeed the main feature of verse writing. Under this scheme, two accented words, at least, in the first line began with the same letter, while in the second line one followed suit ; thus :

I was wery forwardred,
And wente me to reste
Under a brood bank
By a bournes syde ;
And as I lay and lenede,
And loked on the watres,
I slombred into a slepyng,
It sweyed so murye.

How perfectly effective in modern verse this can become is seen from such stately lines as

Of man's first disobedience and the fruit
Of that forbidden tree whose mortal taste
Brought death into the world, and all our woe—

while, in the following lines, simple beauty seems intensified by the device :

Like a glow-worm golden
In a dell of dew.

It is a spontaneous form of expression, as may be seen from the fact of its frequency in proverbial sayings, as

Far-away birds have bonny feathers.

Look before you leap,

and countless other aphorisms.

The next form of artistic expression is metre, which gives pleasure to the ear, not by reiterating words of similar initial letters, but by repeated syllabic pulses. This arises from alternate stress and ease of utterance. It may be alternately accent and want of it, or it may

be the arrangement of accented syllables together, relieved by an unaccented syllable. Thus in the line

When I remember how my days are spent,

it is obvious that there is a regular series of wave-beats, each of which can be separated from its neighbour into five phrases of two syllables each, called "feet" or metrical units, thus,

When I | remem | ber how | my days | are spent.

These lines are named from the number of beats within them. Thus, they may be dissyllabic, as "beauty," or trisyllabic, as "thunder-cloud," and so forth. The commonest in English is the octosyllabic, or "eight-beat" line, used much by Scott, as in *The Lady of the Lake* :

The chief | in si | lence strode | before,

while the decasyllabic, or "ten-beat" line, is known as "heroic verse." The extra two syllables give an added dignity, but the octosyllabic is prime in its simplicity, and best adapted for narrative verse. Thus,

The chief in silence strode before

is much more direct than

The chief in stately silence strode before,

and keeps a tale from becoming burdensome and heavy.

The principal metres or measures have received their title from Greek poetic practice. Thus, the measure which has the accent followed by an unaccented syllable is the Trochaic, as

— ∪ — ∪ — ∪ — ∪
All that glisters is not golden.

It becomes monotonous in a long poem, but it has been used by Longfellow in his *Hiawatha*, though the critics laughed at his Indian, limping to his trochaics, through

the primeval forest. It has a tripping effect; you can feel the beat of dancing feet in it, as

Sport, that wrinkled care derides.

The next is got by reversing the accent, and is the Iambic metre,¹ as

When all Thy mercies, O my God,
My rising soul surveys.

This is a very easy measure, having a very natural beat. Much of our ordinary conversation is spoken in this way, as .

When I was coming down the street, I met a man who spoke to me. It became, in this way, the measure of the Greek tragic poets in their dialogue, as being nearest to human convention.

Of the trisyllabic metres, the first is the Dactylic,² so-called from the joints of a finger, one long and two short, as

Pibroch of Donuil Dhu.

The next is the Amphibrachic,³ or that which has an arm on both sides. It consists of a long syllable between two short ones, thus :

The way is up-winding,
The wide mountains over.

The Anapaestic measure is a Dactyl reversed, that is, two short syllables followed by a long one : ⁴

Do you see how Soracte stands shrouded with snow ?

or,

With his face to the foe.

¹ ∪ - | ∪ - | ∪ - | ∪ - |
² - ∪ ∪ | - ∪ ∪ |
³ ∪ - ∪ | ∪ - ∪ |
⁴ ∪ ∪ - | ∪ ∪ - | ∪ ∪ - | , etc.

Swinburne was notable for his anapaests, which was the measure to which the Greek chorus danced round the altar, in Tragedy. It is very effective, for it leaps right on to the solidly important words in a verse.

There are variations from these measures, but these are the fundamentals of rhythmic writing.

Rhyme is the next important. "Head rhyme" was, as we saw, the characteristic of ancient poetry. "Tail-rhyme" may be said to be the modern distinction. It is as if a bell rang at the end of each line. It is the child of metre, for it is the echo of sound-bearing accent. In the classical period it did not exist. If it be found anywhere in Hebrew, Greek, or Latin verse, it is there by accident. It is absent from some of the greatest of English poetry, which is written in "blank" verse; a rhymed epic could not be thought of now.

In regard to rhyme there are many misunderstandings.

First, there is not such a thing as "eye-rhyme"; it must be all "ear-rhyme." Thus "bear" and "fear" do not rhyme, though to the eye they seem to do so, whereas "bear," "air," "hare," and "heir" are rhymes to the ear. Some eye-rhymes, however, have established their place in English poetry, but only because they once were ear-rhymes, as, "poor" and "door"; "main" and "again"; "love" and "move"; "weak" and "take"; "day" and "tea."

Second, the rhyming syllable must be all that agrees. All that goes before it must be different. Nor can a word rhyme with itself; "bear" and "bear" are not rhymes, neither are "bear" and "bare." Nothing in the world is more socially expansive in this respect. A word in verse is wedded always outside of its clan.

And again, syllables that rhyme must be accented syllables; for example, "sigh" would not rhyme with the closing syllable of "beautifully," though sometimes it is

attempted, to the disaster of both rhyme and rhymester. Yet, a rhyme does not necessarily imply only one syllable. There may be more, as "glory" and "story"; "dreaming" and "gleaming"; "wondering" and "plundering"; though these are in reality practically single rhymes, for the accent is only on one syllable, the rest being unaccented. Byron has one attempt of four syllables, making "eligible" rhyme with "intelligible." Rhymes of two or more syllables are, however, mostly identified with light or humorous verse, or lyrical grotesqueries, or odd assonances, as in Butler's *Hudibras*:

The pulpit, drum ecclesiastic,
Was beat with fist instead of a stick.

Yet the artifice can be used with beautiful effect, especially by poets with Swinburne's unique mastery of melody, as

Send out a song oversea for us,
Heart of their hearts who are free;
Heart of their singer to be for us
More than our singing could be.

Nevertheless, such artifices become exercises of ingenuity rather than art.

In other languages than English, and sometimes in English, through the influence of other languages, there are "internal rhymes," which give quite a musical effect, as,

It's away and away o'er the waves I'd be
With the gull in her flight.
For a little lone isle of the western sea
Is calling to me to-night.

This was especially characteristic of Celtic verse, and seems natural in English writing by Celtic authors.

Rhyme is not mere echo. Hence *assonance* is not rhyme in the English language, though in some others it is equivalent to it. Thus, "bone" and "home," "tan"

and “ram” are assonances, but not rhymes. Under this class fall what are known as “Cockney Rhymes,” for example :

The evening balm
Conveys a charm,

which are illegitimate assonances of the worst and most forbiddable kind.

The various modes of poetic utterance in lyric, epic, ode, sonnet, and hymn are most profitably studied by the mind's communion with the best examples of these in the best anthologies. So, also, the use of figurative and imaginative language is best displayed in the writings of the masters, loving familiarity with which begets a noble custom of thought and expression, such as no treatise of grammarians can impart.

PART II

CHAPTER I

THE BIBLE

IN the midst of the tens of thousands of books which are in the world to-day, there is one to which the testimony of generations has given the title "The Book," "The Bible." None reflects Life and Literature with greater strength or deeper charity. No wise man seeking wisdom, no tired heart seeking rest, can afford to pass it by. More war has been waged around it than around any other piece of literature. It has been a shield to some, and a sword of strife to many. There is no depth to which the spirit has descended but the power of this book has been throbbing underneath ; no height to which the soul has climbed but the glory of its truth has been shining far ahead. It has been a comfort, a strength, an ideal, an incentive. It has been a quarry whence the very richest nuggets of thought have been hewn. It has grown into man's life and twined itself about his aspirations and his necessities.

There is within it the clash of the passions of humanity warring with one another and warring with God ; the wail of the soul for the light it lost in losing the snow-white radiance of the angels. Words like none

earth ever heard, it bears, through the Galilean, who brought to men the message of restoration, echoes and music like the song of dreams, the chanting of seraphim, the harping of the angels.

It is well for man to read what therein is written. It is true that the best and sweetest of all true life has become so steeped in the essence and spirit of Scripture, that it is not so easy to-day to return to the old wisdom which is within it. To know it best and most truly, no critical training is needed in the pedantry of the schoolmen. A child at his mother's knee, perhaps, understands it best of all, along with those who only know the power of its truths in daily life and its sorrows; just as a man may live in a palace, and does not need to be an architect to know that it is beautiful. Though more used than any other book as a missile and weapon, it has never supported wrong, falsehood, or sin.

Two things have given it its undying power: namely, its unity and its eternal humanness.

Any great book must have unity, a deep inner purpose pressing on to one all-prevailing truth wherein all minor pettinesses are lost, and all diversities are unified. Yet, while this one has unity, it has not uniformity; hence its influence in all sorrows, joys, and necessities of humanity.

It has not, for example, unity of language. One great section of it is in the Hebrew tongue, the other in Greek, the language of Homer and Plato, and of the poets whose souls still quiver with passion and with power.

Nor has it unity of form. All kinds of literary composition it contains,—the mystical Hexateuch, half vision and half history; gems of rhapsody wedged within it such as the Chant of Miriam and the Song of Deborah; the stories of the Judges and the Kings, which are the sagas of the Hebrew; the varied sunshine and shadow

of the Psalms with pathos and gladness; the Proverbs of Solomon with their practical wisdom loaded with thought and keen with sarcasm; the song of the love of the shepherdess of Canticles; Job's probing of the mysteries that envelop human existence; the warnings of prophets, the ecstasies of saints; the teaching of Jesus; till the door falls wide apart, and the song of heaven drops out of the clouds upon the rock of Patmos in the sea.

Nor is it the product of a single age. Between some of the books lie silent centuries that have been lost. The patriarchs dwelling in tents on the desert; David and Solomon in the pomp of courts; Babylon and Assyria, Egypt and Greece and Rome,—all the glory of the world clanks across its pages.

Nor is there uniformity in the classes from which the writers sprang. Kings, herdsmen, physicians, rabbis and mystics speak to you as they move.

Whence, then, that unity which makes great Literature? It is not a story of physics, or the evolution of matter, but the story of the divine life, the realization of the highest self in the highest God, the soul moving onward on a great tide of purpose irresistible, to break upon the shore of the eternal. In its humanness, in its inexhaustibleness; in its teaching for man; in the inspiration and consolation which it gives, in the upward impulse which it awakens, making the human hand touch the skirt of the divine, and the all-enfolding divine embrace the human, as the sunshine enfolds every leaf upon a tree, it is unique. The soul never feels the treasure of this secret of calm and hope used up. You can never say that you have taken the last nugget from its depths. However majestic the divine secret revealed may be, it never is of such a kind that it cannot find room for itself in the human heart, and be fused into the innermost being of man. All experiences and all teach-

ings within it, converge upon divine love. What the broken clasp is, with the gem out of it, Scripture would be without this.

You cannot go far through the world without having some of its words following you with regret, or leading you with light upon its face towards the height.

The greatest of our thinkers and teachers have gone down on their knees to drink from this living stream. Living with it, even from the point of view of mere Literature, you live in touch with greatness. Squalid thought makes squalid life. But you cannot look through the wisdom and the beauty of Holy Scripture without instinctively looking upwards. It is the book whence first you learn of God; whence, last, ere your sun goes down, you hear the music of God's dawn; the fountain from which our fathers drank, drawing liberty, courage, hope, faith, fearlessness. It was laid above their heart when they lay sleeping the last long sleep, having fought the good fight and kept the faith; as the flag is laid above a soldier's bosom, when his warfare is ended. It is a book by itself, holding within its covers what none other can know,—the burning bush of the presence of God's Spirit, speaking in quiet places to lonely shepherds and seekers, who have read the mystery of His presence in the stars, and among the quiet hills, and by the lonely shore, and have heard the winds whisper out of the immense void spaces, till their hearts became vessels of a holy light, and they themselves became pathfinders and road-makers for the passing of God into the lives of men.

It is a wonderful book, unapproached, unexcelled,—the calling of a nation, the bondage in the vast civilization of Egypt, the wail over the first-born in the darkness, the crash of the Red Sea waves whelming the pride of Pharaoh, the cry of the soul of David seeking a door

heavenwards out of sin, the rising of a star of promise, the hope of a day to be ; till all the lines of history converge upon a Cross on a lonely hill, from the foot of which diverge all paths, winding and straight, along which move the history, the thought, the life of our own times, and the times that are to be.

It is not a book that has guided only the lives of fools and women and babes. It has moulded the lives of the noblest, and made wise men like Carlyle, Bright, Gladstone, Tennyson, Shakespeare, and Milton as vessels of power and grace. It was for many generations the chief, if not the only text-book of our Scottish sires ; and those whose praises are in all the Churches were made brave enough to live and strong enough to die, drawing deep draughts of grace and power from the stream of Holy Scripture. In the enfolding universalness in which its unity is found ; in its deep power of truth-revealing, its uplifting and guiding grace, its ocean-song of majestic phrase and captivating word, the irresistibility of the Divine within and about it, it vindicates its claim to be Literature, and the greatest utterance of Literature in the language of men.

CHAPTER II

SHAKESPEARE

SHAKESPEARE is the second best example of Literature moved to expression by the memory of the past, the needs of the present, and the hopes of the future. He thrusts into his stage the folly, pride, pomposity, and ambitions of his day. They laugh at one another, and learn their lesson. But he also makes To-day con the note-book of Yesterday, and read therefrom the kingliest lessons of deepest and sincerest truth.

To be able to understand and to appreciate the thoughts and works of Shakespeare, is to have attained to a very high measure and standard of culture. Next to the Bible itself, no body of writings contains more practical wisdom, more pathetic interpretation of the phases, fashions, joys and sorrows, trials and failures of the human heart than the page of this poet. He stands above all poets, by right of majesty, of creatorship, of intensity of vision, of power, of laughter at meanness swaggering in the garb of greatness, of pitifulness beholding the vanity of human ambitions, and the fickleness of human hopes. No poetic hand ever had such skill in gripping the very core of being, in lifting the veil from the human sight, that heart and eye might see and know the meaning and the issues of conduct. He is the greatest manifestation of the best life of the greatest age in all our history.

The soul of man in his day was struggling in its efforts towards liberty of faith. The old world was breaking asunder the boundaries which had been set about it. The new world of the American hemisphere, like a dream rising out of the waves, had emerged into the consciousness of men. Stories of strange races, the mystery of primeval forest, treasure and adventure, came back with kindling power, to the imagination of a growing people. Had these not created Shakespeare, they must have called forth some kindred spirit to people the stage with creations of fancy's wizardry.

The historical environment, full of suggestiveness, is what goes to make a man a poet, apart from his being a mere taxpayer. Shakespeare found a supplementary historical incentive in the fact that he was a Warwickshire boy. The fields of his native county had been drenched with the blood of the battles of the Wars of the Roses, and the Wars of the Barons. What Richard the Second, Richard the Third, and Henry the Seventh had done, formed the staple of the stories told nightly at the fireside, taking the place of the evening paper to-day. You can imagine the nimble-fancied lad, sitting in the shadow, with glowing eyes, listening to the struggles of kings and people, and God's open-handed blow shattering human pride, and judging human error. That much at anyrate of his life in the beginning you must know, and your own imagination must enrich it ere you can understand the provocation of his genius.

Then, again, how Nature would speak to him, through the lives and thoughts of his stage-people. No poet's page is a richer note-book of her imaginations in wood and field, in pool and running stream. His eye carried with it the memory of everything it ever looked upon, even the willow leaves drooping over the drowned Ophelia, shewing their grey side against the greener foliage.

Then his frank fearlessness of dignitaries, which enabled him to get small men in great places up against the background of eternal measurements, piercing the pomp and splendour of heraldic circumstance, till he saw that the hearts of the prince, the earl, and the peasant were pathetically like each other, except for the difference of the motley which clothed them.

A hasty marriage, a somewhat oppressive treatment in consequence of a poaching escapade ; the open road to London, hot-foot ; the holding of horses at the theatre door, and then the mounting of the stage himself, when, somehow, the country lad that had been, perhaps, an occasional Roman soldier, became himself the leading creator of character upon the boards. He did not go up like a rocket ; he steadily climbed like the rising sun. Many an old play, lying rusty in the dust of theatrical cupboards, he polished and re-shaped, as one makes shields and spears out of what is little better than old iron and useless tin ; till he found his own voice ; and old memories of ancient tales moved through his heart, and human joys shining in love, and human sorrows red-eyed with tragic weeping, looked into the very depths of his being, and made him tell men what he saw, and what he thought.

His work falls into four distinct expressions. The first is the time of youth and fancy, all aglow with the beauty of the morning of life, the richest flower of which is *Romeo and Juliet*, where human love, with human hate running at the heels of it till it slay it, speaks to our age still, out of the glamour of Italy.

His next period, the heart of which beats best in the *Merchant of Venice*, *The Midsummer Night's Dream*, and *As You Like It*, shews a firmer pulse. His third is entirely overshadowed by dissatisfaction with life itself. A heavy cloud seems to hang over him. It is his great

tragedy period. There is no joy in its page, yet every line is great. It is now that he makes you look into Rome and see the soul of Brutus, torn between friendship and what he thinks to be his duty, till Caesar, gashed by the daggers of his friends, falls dead at the foot of Pompey's pillar. Through this period move Hamlet, Prince of Denmark, racked by the daily promptings of revenge, skirting now the dark fringe of madness, and anon the margin of eternity; Othello, driven stark mad and blind with the anger of jealousy, till he slays the woman he loves as his life; Macbeth, tortured by ambition, like a dragon he has taken to his bosom, till it rends the very life from his heart; Lear, once a great king, led by indiscriminating senility into ruin and madness; Timon, sneering his hate of a selfish world along the shore of the restless ocean; Anthony, lying in the bondage of lust, in the lap of Cleopatra; and Coriolanus, haughty unbridled courage, arrogant in its strength, making life a futility. Never out of any brain, hot with disappointment and deeply wise in the bitterness of the world, did there emerge such a march-past of the giant terriblenesses of mortal life.

In his last was "the setting sun and music at the close,"—all the sweet magic and dignified gracefulness of the poet gathered into the enchanted isle which is the stage of *The Tempest*.

The variety of conception, the greatness of representation, the truth of the knowledge and insight into human nature, which these masterpieces display, make them a pedestal upon which, immovable, through time, until eternity blows out time's brief candle, this Shakespeare stands sure, as an admonisher, and guide of men.

CHAPTER III

BOOKS OF THE SOUL

HE who would understand what soul-literature means must make acquaintance with such masters of spiritual insight and aspiration as Bunyan, Augustine, and Thomas à Kempis.

Bunyan is one of the living miracles of Literature. Humanity, knowing itself, has in all ages acknowledged his power. His conception of a soul's pilgrimage from this world to that which is to come, his deep insight into human nature, his humour and pathos, and his invincible faith, clambering, indomitably and undauntedly, away out of the darkness of misery and sin, have secured for him eternal recognition. The inspiration of his work was a direct act of the Spirit of God, which, in the seventeenth century, passed over palaces and courts, and, entering the tinker's dwelling, breathed into the heart that was dreaming there, and sent it forth with its dreams, full-sail, across the ages. He who would know man's way of escape up the steep and over the moors to God, as well as the loafers and the loungers that will try to hold him and pursue him with mocking laughter, when he is running from hell to heaven, along with the defeats, failures, and sorrows, with the atmosphere of the quiet places full of dreams and music, where angels walk and talk, will learn it most of all from the dream of the Tinker of Bedford.

This is just the kind of book in which a man catches sight of his own back, and learns how he looks in the eyes of his fellow-men! As one gazing into the extinct crater of some volcano in a lava desert, sees the scars of old earth-agonies, and is touched with awe, so through a page like Bunyan's he looks into the depths behind the heart, noting the effect of passions and sorrows which have left a trail of ashes out of the core of his inmost being.

No novelist, not even Dickens, has ever created such a gallery of human characters. They have become living portions of the soul's experience. Mistrust and Timorous, Giant Despair, Vanity Fair and the sneering faces of those who make mock of the men that seek for truth; Little-Faith and Atheist, Loosefoot with the weary beat of his pilgrimage searching for evil among the characters of better men,—what studies of the inmost soul! No philosopher ever eclipsed, for psychological insight, this man of Bedford. Amongst the five or six immortal writers whose works will be remembered by the saints, and carried in their bosoms into the presence of God, this will be one. In his pages, you find the most convincing proof of the futility of reckoning verse as equivalent to poetry. The Allegory itself all through is a great poem, one of the world's memorable creative works, but the verses interspersed are prosiest bits of moralizing. He has the faculty, in a unique degree, of forcing you, almost before you know it, to measure yourself against the universe. He gives a name to feelings which before were but vague and formless shadows. You become owner of yourself, with the responsibilities of that very grave proprietorship. And then you find yourself teaching yourself, in the voice of John Bunyan, what it means to be true, God-seeking, Love-giving, Christ-finding.

In another way, Saint Augustine, Bishop of Hippo,

teaches the secret of a soul through the lights and shadows of his own. In his *Confessions* he draws aside the curtain of his soul and shews how the sunshine of God's love and the love of his dear mother Monica ripened his heart for Christ. Augustine was a man of deep and profound scholarship, whose analytic knowledge of humanity gave him a position entirely outstanding as a spiritual specialist. He remains in history as a man who has made a lasting mark on theological thought ; yet, bewitchingly revealing his own heart, he has held and holds the interest of all struggling men and women. Indeed, the books which most of all live amongst men are those which are cries of a soul seeking light. Men cannot resist the depth of their warning, their insight, and outlook.

A choice soul is most often haunted by two things : first, the sins that have disgraced itself, and second, the fear lest God have forsaken it. These two things make for a spirit-moving literature. Augustine's *Confessions* belongs to that class. It is a book of the utterances of a deep theologian, a man of the world, and a scholar. They are not the outcome of raw hysteria. Especially in them do you find the influence of the memory of a Christian mother ; for Monica was, like her son, a soul-searcher, who sometimes saw her own spirit before her, draped, like a ghost, in her sins. She taught her child to love the name of Jesus, till it lingered in his heart like music. She hung around his feet the silver chain of loving remembrance, and the haunting power of a mother's prayers followed him all his days. Carelessness, luxury, lust, held him in thralldom through many a long year, till, like many another, he could say, "At last I was weary of a cold heart towards Him." The ice melted from his soul, and then his whole life ran singing to the sea. All the stories of fine sensitive souls, whose

sagging chords God was tuning through pain into harmony with His own heart-beat, have this same touch, and they communicate a helping thrill to others.

The third of this trinity in spiritual culture is Thomas à Kempis, whose *Imitation of Christ* has been as the very bread of life cast upon the stream of living thought. This quiet man, out of his living grave in the monastery, has walked through all the world with wonder on his lips. His book was a lamp kindled in the darkest generation before the dawn. It redeems a whole age. It is a window of the pure in heart through which we can behold the white Christ. I remember how it gripped me as I sat reading it by a Highland burn. Out of its page leaped the words, "Be a man. Habit is conquered by habit." He who reads it lovingly, knowing his own necessities, will be a richer and stronger servant of the truth than he has ever been.

No culture, however varied its topics, can be the least complete, that has not tasted of these intensely spiritual wells. No cup will be clean that has not been washed in these streams.

CHAPTER IV

MILTON

THE Literature of a period is the recording dial whereon we look and learn what o'clock it is, and how the weather goes. Especially is this true of the poet and poetical literature. For if Literature in general be the expression of the life, poetry is especially the voice and expression of the heart, of an age. The poet is the child of feeling and aspiration ; more than any of the children of men does he tread the ways of life in faith and hope ; and so we find in poetry, and especially in great poetry, the intensest utterance and embodiment of the inner life of epochs, and every great singer the keystone and the keynote of the age for which he sings.

While thus an author, and especially a poet, is the true child of his race and his environment, is dominated and guided by his period, it is, of course, the fact that if he be a truly great author, he rises above it all, for genius and greatness are independent of place and time.

John Milton, so immense in genius, so magnificent in achievement, is not outside of this category, and he cannot be thoroughly understood apart from the period through which he lived. It was a period of conflictory thought and passion ; the struggle of opposing tendencies of life and feeling, through which slowly but surely deepened a chasm in the midst of society, fathomless,

yet never wider than a pike or a blade could bridge, till the life's blood of a king dripped from the verge. The struggle of a great people, vindicating its personality and its rights before the world at whatever cost, was the awakening impulse of the great English poet, whose heart had beat with the pulse of the conflict through which his nation was passing.

No culture, therefore, can avoid studying the blind Puritan poet whose name is so familiar to everybody, whose *Paradise Lost* is on almost every person's shelf, but whose page is very frequently a dead letter to most.

When Milton was born in 1608, Spenser, who is the red rose of English poetry, had been dead nine years; and, when Shakespeare died, Milton was only a child of eight. In Milton's work is found the full-voiced utterance of that struggle of the Puritans of England for liberty of conscience, which ended in the death of Charles the First upon the scaffold.

It had made men in England think of the secret of the soul's sufferings for sin and selfishness. It was the source of a revelation of national responsibility, by the banks of the Thames, just as truly as that earlier one by the banks of the Euphrates. The stern oratorio of the Puritan poet could see no greater theme than the attempt to justify the ways of his own nation before God, in the struggle against regal tyranny and whim, while his mind fell back for justification of his party, on the predestined will of God. Yet, in his great poem he lifted himself out of the swirl of party. He waited long, till "the sea of noises and hoarse disputes" had subsided, and imagination, strong-winged and eagle-visioned, rose so that it saw things in the light of the universal. His poem was thus not the struggle of a faction or a nation, but the struggle of the immortal soul.

He was the greatest religious poet of all modern times, with the grandeur and vision of a prophet, the fearlessness of a liberator, the indignation of a patriot, against tyranny.

Dante's poem, though its scene was set in heaven, hell, and purgatory, was as much political as religious. Milton, on the other hand, places himself in the midst of the soul's struggle with sin and God. Through his verse you hear the beating of God's heart, the pulse of the wings of angels, the angry rush of fiends; while at the back of it is the thought that the soul of man is worth fighting for, being an eternal part of God.

Through the struggle of a people maddened towards vindication of their liberties, John Milton's spirit received its developing impulse. His soul, then, smit into flame, burned its way upward until it became a steady glory in the firmament of English poetry.

In his twenty-first year he wrote his *Ode on the Morning of Christ's Nativity*, basing it on the ancient idea that at the advent of the Holy Child, the world was at peace, all nature calm, until the stillness thrilled with the angels' song. He set before himself the noblest ideals, from the beginning. He dedicated himself to the service of poetry, which he believed to be the service of the Highest. He shrank from entering the ministry of the Church, though that had been his father's plan, as he could not subscribe vows which he did not believe. He gives a glimpse "far ben" his heart, of his ideal of life:

All is, if I have grace to see it so,
As ever in my great Taskmaster's eye.

That was something worth having as a guiding star.

For six years, Milton devoted himself to study at his father's home at Horton. Here he wrote his *L' Allegro*, reflecting the joy of the mind at ease with itself and God;

and *Il Penseroso*, reflecting the brooding semi-melancholy mood of the student to whom the shadows speak. The best poem of this period is *Lycidas*, an elegy on his friend King, who had been drowned on his way to Dublin, a composition thrown into imitation of the classic pastoral, as used by Theocritus the Greek.

With the best credentials which his country could give him, Milton went abroad to Italy, deepening his knowledge of men and manners by the discipline of travel. Drawn homewards by the rumour of the struggle against the king, he returned, and became Secretary of State to Cromwell. It was a big and busy time which he had entered upon, absolutely antagonistic to that leisure and opportunity of contemplation required for the composition of great verse; but at last, and soon enough, it all was past. May 1660 saw the Stuarts restored, in the person of Charles the Second, and all that had been most sacred to Milton and his fellows was now set to the accompaniment of mockery and laughter. The angel of death passed over him. The feet of those who were seeking for victims for the scaffold, lingered at his door, and then went their way. When the silence of retirement fell around him, he settled himself to the composition of the great work which, from his very youth, had flickered before him like a dream. The subject is the Fall of Man, the fight for man's soul between heaven and hell.

The cosmogony of the poem is simple enough. What Milton saw in the world of the stars was the Ptolemaic system, the obsolete theory of the earth which the system of Copernicus superseded. Heaven was far above, and hell a flaming pit beneath, strewn with the fallen angels, while between these two hung the new creation, the world, a shining jewel of God's love, surrounded by chaos, and destined to be the stage of conflict between

eternal good and evil. Hell is nine days and nights fall from heaven. Sin and death together had beaten out a causeway through chaos, reaching to earth, while heaven was linked by its golden chains and staircase to the place of the destiny of man.

In the Ptolemaic system, the earth was the centre of the universe, the stars and planets moving round the earth in spheres,—an entirely artificial scheme, invented to explain the changes of the starry heavens. Notwithstanding his adoption, for poetic purposes, of this obsolete theory, he, however, shews in the poem his knowledge of the more modern Copernican system.

The style of *Paradise Lost* is entirely great. The subject is, of course, the most stupendous that ever could appeal to human thought; but it is clothed in a robe of language entirely regal. Majesty, music, movement like a giant's stride, solemn phases like starlight, intellectual grasp, wide-armed in its stretch, and a sustained upliftingness that has within it always a beat like living wings, make it the greatest achievement of verse. The tests of greatness in Literature, which here do not fail, are sincerity and strength. No mean life ever throbbed such utterance. Milton's great style was the natural voice of his great soul, above all fear of mortal judgment, looking with the clear inner light past dying things, into the eternal.

CHAPTER V

THE POETRY OF HUMANITY

LITERATURE, as we saw, reflects the age of which it is the utterance. With some of the Puritan poets, and with Donne, Herbert, and Vaughan, the voice of English poetry was prayerful. It was not that these wrote hymns, but that they made their verse the utterance of a mysticism of the truest face-to-face type.

The period which began with Dryden and ended with Pope was very different in tone and taste. It was formalized theology,—theological philosophy put into verse. Though it attacked the Deists, it still leaves the reader with the feeling that God was very far off from those who wrote it. There is no emotion of personal relationship, or personal contact with the divine, although it is religious verse.

The eighteenth century has been far too much looked upon, perhaps, as entirely irreligious. It is true that it was in reaction against its coldness and impersonal belief that the school of Wesley arose, with its devout sense of individual contact with God and Christ, suffused with personal feeling. But the religion of the eighteenth century should be considered as the soil from which that school of devout emotion and conversion drew some of its strength. The poetic expression of the period, however, had little, if anything, to do with this movement,

which was one affecting the masses of the people in general, while the school of Dryden and Pope had its centre in the city and court, and cultured classes.

In Pope, in his *Universal Prayer*, one hears as it were the voice of a later day, as in the verse,

Teach me to feel another's woe,
To hide the fault I see.
That mercy I to others shew,
That mercy shew to me.

This, however, has not the throb of a heart suffused with the love of God as in Christ Jesus, filled with the sense of pardon,—the finite trembling with joy in the shadow of the Infinite. It is like the worship of a star, remote and coldly shining,—not the contact and communion with a Man of Sorrows, whose feet walked in the same ways which have wounded the feet of the singer, and whose Cross is ever before the ransomed sinner's eyes. It might have been written by Marcus Aurelius, or by anybody, of any religion other than Christianity; for, the fact of the matter is, that this religious poetry of the eighteenth century, before Cowper's time, had not Christ within it, Christ before it, and the garment of Christ enfolding it.

But men's hearts and eyes were becoming open to God's voice in nature,—not as in a garden like Pope's garden, with trim parterres and nicely gravelled walks. Thomson was teaching men to see the plough drawing the furrow along the hill-side, to listen to the winds in autumn and in winter, to hear the birds, and to feel all about them the beat of the clean will of God in places pure and still. The joys and the sorrows of the hamlet spoke with articulate voice through Gray and Goldsmith, while Cowper and Crabbe at last gave utterance direct to the struggles of human life within and without.

Isaac Watts, in his hymns, expresses an entirely objective theology ; and yet, it is his hand tapping on the door that opened it for the day of Cowper. That singer was awakened by the influence and impulse of the Wesleyan movement, which came in contact with him through his friendship with John Newton. That movement meant the great uplifting of the soul of England Godwards. Stirred as he was by Newton, we could only expect what we have,—the personal cry of the wounded soul, or the tears of eyes that have suddenly been opened to see the way of wandering from God. Newton himself was as remarkable an evidence of the personal saving power of Christ as any of the apostles could have been. His varied life of carelessness, sin, and cruelty, till, as a slave captain in a storm, the still small voice, speaking through the thunder and stress, awakened him, first to shame, and then to song of thanksgiving ; and made his influence on a sensitive soul like Cowper, torrential and awful as a lightning flame. As Stopford Brooke puts it concisely : “The friend of Cowper was Newton, and Newton was the child of Whitefield.”

The keynote of Cowper's work is in the verse :

Hark, my soul ! it is the Lord ;
'Tis thy Saviour, hear His word ;
Jesus speaks, and speaks to thee :
“ Say, poor sinner, lov'st thou Me ? ”

The entrance of this absolutely personal note made Cowper the forerunner, in many respects, of Wordsworth, Shelley, and Byron. The ego-wonder in the universe learnt through him to find speech, but first of all, in him, by the way of religion. The shadow of his theology, that haunting uncertainty as to whether even the fringe of the redeeming love of Christ had touched his life, tinged all his hope and faith with the darkness of doubt,

and, at the same time, lifted him into shining stillnesses, where glamour dwells. You find it in his

O for a closer walk with God,
A calm and heavenly frame,
A light to shine upon the road
That leads me to the Lamb !

The argumentativeness, and logically legal pleading of Pope and his school, make their utterance as cold as ice, alongside of the warm-blooded passion of a thing like that.

Faith meant with Cowper not a thing to speak much about ; but yet the deepest, dearest experience of his inmost life, the thing that lifted him from death and despair into hope and life again.

I was a stricken deer that left the herd
Long since ; with many an arrow deep infixed
My panting side was charged, when I withdrew
To seek a tranquil death in distant shades.
There was I found by One who had Himself
Been hurt by the archers. In His side He bore,
And in His hands and feet, the cruel scars.
With gentle force soliciting the darts
He drew them forth, and healed, and bade me live.

In the eighteenth century the school of Pope looked upon man as the subject of discussion.

The proper study of mankind is man.

But with them this study was devoid of emotion. It was man's reason and intellectual power that appealed. In the school of Cowper, on the other hand, and in the age that followed, it is man's emotional side, the side of feeling, his joys and sorrows, and his aspirations, everything that makes the difference between a lay figure and a living creature, that emerges on the stage. Besides, the progress of national life and policy lent their weight to

this development. The revolution in the industrial world, the strides of advance in the industrial life of the people through the invention of machinery, and the concentration of crowded populations into towns, with the resultant effects upon the conditions of working folks, turned attention to the principles of political economy, and the conditions and relations of labour, so that a vast interest was focused upon the poor, and upon the soul of man. A poetry of humanity came into being. Men could not rest contented with the cold creed of a frosty philosophy as the panacea of human woe. A warm faith had to enfold the starving, who sat at fireless hearths and bare tables; and the first steps of the ladder of beauty up which poesy climbed to the day of Wordsworth, were laid then in their places. The study of the theology of nature, the listening for the voice of God in the woods and in the sorrowing universe, the turning back of the gaze past the little clevernesses of the court and university, towards the spirit of the nineteenth Psalm, which shews the heavens declaring the glory of God, but the human soul still, evermore, a repository of the law eternal, became henceforward characteristic of English poetry.

Looked at in this respect, brotherhood, liberty, the preciousness of love, found their place on the poetic page, and beyond that liberty Cowper saw greater freedom still, that freedom of the soul "bought with His blood, Who gave it to mankind." In this rooted, he first felt what Tennyson later sang: the unity of interest, love, and hope, which cast across the page of the unwritten story of the ages the glamour of such a dream as a "parliament of man, the federation of the world." His utterance was the tide on which floated into the heart of man the rich freight of modern hymnody, which must abide for all time as evidence

and proof of how closely modern enterprise, modern science, modern trade, with all the hurry, fever, and fret they bring, turn the heart more and more towards quiet communion with the eternal love, that ever environs the changing phenomena of a dying world, which in itself can hold no lasting satisfactions for the soul.

CHAPTER VI

WORDSWORTH, SHELLEY, AND BYRON

FROM the time of Dryden till the middle of the eighteenth century, was a flat time in English poetry. But towards the close of the eighteenth century, a manifestation of quickening stirred both thought and politics, a feeling such as had not been in the world since the period of the Renaissance. It found utterance in Germany in philosophic form, while in France it found hands and feet and voice in the Revolution.

It would, of course, be wrong to say that in the flat period of our poetic history, poetry was entirely dead. The very names of Pope and Gray, Collins and Goldsmith, prove that the poetic spirit was but sleeping, albeit she only turned in her sleep in the hearts of these men. She was finally awakened from her slumber by Cowper and Burns.

Wordsworth was the big product of the hour of quickening. He was born in the shadow of the Cumberland hills, and he voluntarily spent the best part of his life among them. Not the Cambridge dons, but the mountains, the waterfalls, and the lakes were his great professors, whose teaching varied with the varying day, draping his soul in sunlight and moonlight and the drifting cloud.

Coming into contact with Coleridge, whose poetic

muse suffers from wearing too constantly a philosopher's robe, Wordsworth formed with him a friendship both of the heart and the head, and they became prophets of a movement which vitally affected English poetry.

Wordsworth's attitude was entirely at variance with the accepted position in regard to poetry. He held that the poet was to be no theorist about Nature, but must converse with her face to face, and heart to heart; yet the poet's position was to be not, as so frequently with Sir Walter Scott, so much the drawing up of a Scotland Yard table of description for identification purposes, as the reminiscent visualizing of Nature's moods.

His definition of poetry was "emotion recollected in tranquillity"; but this was to be based on individual knowledge, experience, and truth. This, of course, is the secret of true emotion in poetry,—memory pulling the heart-strings till they cry aloud. He believed in bringing Nature into the grasp of feeling by a poetic fusion of effects.

Up to this time, there were certain conventional phrases, which, like stage properties, scenery, and clothing of stereotyped characters, had come down through generations in the use of verse. Youth was "sprightly youth," the dawn was "dappled dawn." Epithets that had been worn trite, rubbed round like the stones of a stream, until they had lost their edge, were kept in the stock-pot of poetry, and no verse fitted the conventional standard unless these were used. It was quite natural, therefore, that a great deal of tin thunder mingled with the ripple of the Fount of Hippocrene.

Wordsworth, in his essays, which formed a kind of poetic *apologia pro vita sua*, protested against this method, and appealed for a return to truth and first causes. He declared that his ideal was the use of such language as was really employed by men, coloured, of

course, with imagination, tracing through incidents and associations the primary laws of our nature. He chose for his experiments low and rustic life, because in such a sphere there is less restraint of feeling, and the essential passions of the heart find directest utterance. Elementary emotions exist in such circumstances in their greatest simplicity. We can take it that Wordsworth's idea of the essentials of poetry was that it must consist of sincerity, truth, and knowledge, set to the moving spell of music and colour. This is pretty much Milton's idea of poetry as being "simple, sensuous, and passionate."

Keats, on the other hand, set beauty before everything, on the ground of his maxim that "beauty was truth." Coleridge, who comes into line with the consideration of this subject, held that no man was ever a great poet, unless at the same time he was a profound philosopher, looking at the topic from the point of view that poetry was a criticism of life rather than the reflexion of life.

Here, again, the weakness of Coleridge's own position found utterance; for he repeatedly made a poem co-equal with a sermon. Wordsworth frequently fell into the same error, preaching when he thought he was singing, for he was naturally prolix, and was oftener sitting on a mossy stone for pulpit, than holding on to the neck of a winged Pegasus, in soaring flight.

It was in the volume called *Lyrical Ballads*, issued in 1798 by Wordsworth and Coleridge jointly, that the gage was thrown down. This noteworthy book, the threshold stone of a new period, contained Wordsworth's *Tintern Abbey*, so full of direct pathetic interpretation of nature, and Coleridge's *Ancient Mariner*, where the most stupendous effects are secured by the use of language gaunt with the simplicity of the old ballads.

In 1807, he gave to the world his *Ode to Duty*,

Intimations of Immortality, and *The Solitary Reaper*, the last-named, in its chaste simplicity, touching the very deepest chords of imaginative feeling. The verse

Will no one tell me what she sings?
Perhaps the plaintive numbers flow
For old unhappy far-off things,
And battles long ago !

remains one of the most striking examples of the truth of "emotion recollected in tranquillity."

To him all nature, in all its forms, was a symbol. He found a lesson under every stone that he turned, in every flower that glimpsed at him ; and the world was more than a book to his soul, it was a Bible of the living God.

Of course, with one who wrote so much and so constantly it was impossible to escape from dull moments, when Imagination nodded, and Fancy limped. Yet few poets had at the same time such brooding thought, combined with beauty of verse, chaste richness of vocabulary, and at once the abstractedness of the great manner and the directness of the lyric cry.

The two sonnets, the one written on Westminster Bridge, which is a true bit of genre painting, combined with the other beginning,

The world is too much with us, late and soon,
Getting and spending we lay waste our powers,

are amongst the immortal things which men have written through deep and rapturous insight into nature and humanity.

Shelley, also a voice of this period, and ranged on the side of the new school, was sensuous and ethereal, and in many ways entirely of his own order. His poetry is an emanation of his own soul. He is like a magician pulling rosy clouds of spiritual magic out of his heart, and setting them adrift amongst our grey skies. His own *Cloud*,

and his *Ode to the Skylark*, reflect phases of pure spirit. As a manifestation, he is somewhat cognate with Byron. He was not a poet of reflection. He wrote, as it were, in lightning of passionate rebellion against law and convention.

Byron was an example of a singing soul at variance with the universe, sick of restraint, kicking against the very stars. He is often a seraph "in a huff," and he himself so weary and impatient of his times and his environment, that he finds satisfaction only in the contemplation of outlaws, corsairs, and roués, who, frequently, from lack of restraint, become stage pirates and pinch-beck gallants.

CHAPTER VII

SCOTT, KEATS, AND BURNS

THERE are two methods of expression in poetry, the objective and the subjective. The objective poet looks upon nature with intelligent eye, and uses it as a background to the deeds of men, whom he describes as he sees them, leaving his readers to interpret through their own feelings, the effect of the picture. This is the method of Homer and of Scott.

The subjective poet, on the other hand, looks into his own soul, and into the souls of others. To him a flower in the meadow ceases to be, in fact, hardly ever is, merely a blossom, a bit of beauty. It speaks to him of the life pressing up from the heart of nature, as love presses up through the deepest core of humanity. A blackbird in the tree, or a lark in the sky, speaks to him, tells him the secrets of sorrow, of beauty, of hope. The wind in the darkness becomes subcharged with storm-blown tragedy and pain.

The difference is strikingly seen in the descriptions of such poets as Scott and Keats. The former in his delineation of Norham Castle, in the opening of *Marmion*, makes a picture which stands clean-cut against the visual sky. Once read, it never can be forgotten. At every stroke the warder's figure surmounting it, stands out clearer, as if you were watching the development of a photographic plate.

Day set on Norham's castled steep,
 And Tweed's fair river, broad and deep,
 And Cheviot's mountains lone :
 The battled towers, the donjon keep,
 The loophole grates, where captives weep,
 The flanking walls that round it sweep,
 In yellow lustre shone.
 The warriors on the turrets high, -
 Moving athwart the evening sky,
 Seem'd forms of giant height ;
 Their armour, as it caught the rays,
 Flash'd back again the western blaze,
 In lines of dazzling light.
 Saint George's banner, broad and gay,
 Now faded as the fading ray
 Less bright, and less, was flung ;
 The evening gale had scarce the power
 To wave it on the donjon tower,
 So heavily it hung.
 The scouts had parted on their search,
 The Castle gates were barr'd ;
 Above the gloomy portal arch,
 Timing his footsteps to a march,
 The warder kept his guard ;
 Low humming, as he paced along,
 Some ancient Border gathering song.

There is here the splendid strength of battlemented feudal power which appealed to Scott's romantic nature. It flings across your soul the glamour of the light of days long faded. Yet, the description is entirely objective. It is his eye that is moved. He is telling nothing of the appeal to his heart ; nevertheless, if ever anything was written out of the deepest love of a man for what he looked upon, these lines were so written.

Compare that, however, with the exquisite, passionate beauty of subjective yearning in the picture by Keats, in his *Ode to a Nightingale*, where the influence of that soul-drenching song forces him to make his poetic appeal, in beauty that arrests the very beating

of the heart, and fills us who read the lines with the same longing, whose depths are unutterable, which moved the poet himself to write as he listened. How he, by a natural picture, creates an analogue of his own mystic yearning.

Perhaps the self-same song that found a path
Through the sad heart of Ruth, when, sick for home,
She stood in tears amid the alien corn ;
The same that oft-times hath
Charm'd magic casements, opening on the foam
Of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn.

These lines, especially the last two, though they are vividly reproductive, are draped in the mystery of the remote, the beautiful, the romantic ; and the picture can only be looked at as if through a prism of absolute glamour.

The poem to the nightingale stands, in its subjective power, as an immortal thing. All that ever makes for pathos and beauty, all that is at the back of all longing and yearning, the joys that cannot be expressed, and the sorrows too deep for tears, lie shining in it, like a child of dream asleep in the meads of Asphodel.

This subjective sympathy with nature, returning upon the heart that feels it, is found richly in Burns ; as when he wonders that the birds can sing, and the Braes of Doon be beautiful, while he stands heart-broken amid the sheen of it all,

An' I, sae weary, fu' o' care.

It is this distinction which makes for difference in the genius of poets. There is no comparison in this respect between the simple yeoman in hodden-grey, following his plough, and the cultured Sheriff reproducing in his study what his eye had seen, and what his notebook held.

The heart of Burns was a frail enough vessel, but it was full to overflowing with the rich golden wine of genius. Yet, his objective descriptive power was also magnificent. Few souls have come into the world so encyclopaedic in their variety, with such power of sarcasm, of tear-dropping sympathy, of gloom-splitting laughter, of imaginative, reminiscent, visualizing passion. His fancy runs among earthly experiences as a faun let loose among the yokels in a fair. His tender piteousness is like a weeping angel caught among thorns.

So many definitions of genius have been attempted that one trembles before rashly venturing upon another formula. Whatever it is, it certainly is not, from the poetic point of view, "the capacity of taking pains," but, in reality, the ability of getting your singing heart out of the cramping environment of pettiness, and the soul's wings free from hampering details.

It was Ebenezer Erskine who spoke of a moment of ecstasy, in which he got his head "out of time into eternity." That expresses in a word the capacity of genius, and the difference between merely recording nature, its impressions and charms, as if by a system of double entry in a kind of literary cash-book and ledger, and the poetic gift of carrying these in your heart, as a child carries, out of the woods, posies of every hue, and garlands of every kind.

Scott and Burns resemble one another in their big human manliness, in their sense of honour, in their admiration of all that was beautiful and true. But to Scott a suit of armour with a moonbeam falling on it, a ruined abbey with its mouldering corbels black against the sky, a crumbling tower above a sullen stream, were dearer far than anything in earth besides. To Burns, on the other hand, humanity, living, breathing,

singing, loving, sorrowing, laughing, were more than all its trappings could ever be.

A man's a man for a' that.

Hence, though Scott wrote with his glance so often over his shoulder, Burns looked into the running stream of To-day. Listening to nature's heart, he heard the beating of the heart of God. He saw, even in Lazarus with his scars, the potentialities of humanity as well as humanity's failure; and, noting the wounds in his own inmost being, found strength rather in the hope of the days that were to be, than in the remembrance of the days that had been.

Therein lies the secret of his invincible appeal, his universal throb, his mastery of men.

CHAPTER VIII

VICTORIAN MOODS

It is a remarkable fact that the poets of the Victorian era fall into triads of great names. Take first Barry Cornwall, Thomas Hood, and Matthew Arnold as representatives of three moods of the period. Barry Cornwall's genius is dramatic and intensely lyrical; Hood is a heart-singer; Arnold is the apostle of culture, intellectuality, and abstract psychological and critical genius.

Barry Cornwall's lyrics cannot help making the soul keep time to them. Fresh, and vigorous, with the spontaneity of a genuine lilt about them, they are true songs, perhaps the truest of their century. One cannot read them without feeling scraps of old tunes stirred in the memory. They are songs of the open air and the fields, the life dear to our nation.

He sings too, of the sea, that bulwark of Britain, which has made and kept her what she is among the nations, girdling her with a belt of azure and of foam; and it is a topic that stirs the soul of every son of our island, for the battle-blood of old sea-peoples is in our veins.

He can sing, too, a sturdy chorus of convivial life—no maudlin melody, but the song of manly, happy hearts, as in *The Vine Song* :

Sing ! who sings
To her who weareth a hundred rings !

Or in the fresh buoyancy of *Drink and fill the Night with Mirth*, or in the sinister revelry of *King Death* :

King Death was a rare old fellow,
He sat where no sun could shine,
And he lifted his hand so yellow,
And poured out his coal-black wine.
Hurrah for the coal-black wine !

There came to him many a maiden,
Whose eyes had forgot to shine,
And widows with grief o'erladen,
For a draught of his coal-black wine.
Hurrah for the coal-black wine !

The scholar left all his learning,
The poet his fancied woes,
And the beauty her bloom returning,
Like life to the fading rose.
Hurrah for the coal-black wine !

All came to the rare old fellow,
Who laughed till his eyes dropped brine,
And he gave them his hand so yellow,
And pledged them in Death's black wine.
Hurrah for the coal-black wine !

He can sigh a Horatian gem like that beginning :

Sit down, sad soul, and count
The moments flying.

Barry Cornwall's bent was dramatic. His tragedy, *Mirandola*, was brought out by Macready and Kemble in Covent Garden. He found the age, however, disinclined to listen, and it is upon his songs and lyrics that his fame depends. He was a school-fellow of Byron, and an associate of Hunt, Lamb, and Keats. Indeed, like Lamb, he seems to have been born somewhat out of due time. One fancies there was a niche for him somewhere in the Elizabethan age, which he might have filled. In his songs, however, he is independent of any school, his

nature lifting him alike above the metaphysical dreams of Wordsworth and the idyllic strain of Keats.

Hood is, as we said, a heart-singer. Well has he been styled the "Poet of Humanity." A deep sympathetic soul, he was yet kept from the slightest tincture of mawkishness by a crystal vein of humour. He moves the soul to tears, and then, next moment, with a sly dig in the ribs, makes the world roll with laughter. With all the faculties, gifts, and art of the truest poets, befitting him for the highest achievements, yet cramped, and hindered in his flights by ill-health, poverty, and continual drudgery to keep the wolf from the door—the old story of the literary life—he sank into an early grave, yet leaving behind some utterances which should not die. Dark as his own life was, he was grateful for the beams that sometimes fell across it; and his kind heart sorrowed intensely for the sorrows of others. His soul shuddered at the iniquity of "sweating" dens, where the poor needlewomen of London, in their dingy garrets, slowly dying in nakedness and destitution, sewed silk and spangles for the rich and greedy. And he cried out against the horror with a cry that can never be silenced through all earth's ages of oppression. He sang *The Song of the Shirt*, and it stirred the heart of the world. We need the voice of another Hood amongst us to-day, the gaze of a Hood to see to the core of the great social questions that are looming above society even now, like a shadow that may one day cloud the sun, and the cry of a Hood to tell us once again wherein the error lies. Yet, the world left this noble soul, as it had left Burns and Milton, Butler and Otway, and how many more of its immortals, to be drowned in a sea of struggling labour unrequited, only rising, when all was over, to put a laurel on the green sod above the heart that was past all trouble.

Hood had to jest to live, when his soul was quivering with agony, and dreaming sweet, lovely dreams, which never could be accomplished. The world looked on, as it does in circus and theatre, and applauded the dying agonies, as though they were in the programme, caring not, because it knew not that it was largely a play of masks and faces, with a breaking heart beneath it all. Yet, this poet, whom the world made its professional jester, could breathe music which for sweetness and quaintness takes us back to those quiet fields where Herrick and Vaughan sing. Does not the true touch of the artist tremble in his picture of *Ruth*, where

She stood breast-high amid the corn,
Clasped by the golden light of morn.

A cameo cut in words.

Or look at the sweet tearful naturalness of *The Death-bed* :

We watched her breathing through the night,
Her breathing soft and low,
As in her breast the wave of life
Kept heaving to and fro.

So silently we seemed to speak,
So slowly moved about,
As we had lent her half our powers
To eke her living out.

Our very hopes belied our fears,
Our fears our hopes belied,
We thought her dying when she slept,
And sleeping when she died.

Or, again, the dreadful power of insight into the conscience which murder has stained with horrid gore, in *Eugene Aram* :

But guilt was my grim chamberlain
That lighted me to bed ;
And drew my midnight curtains close
With fingers bloody red.

Merrily rose the lark and shook
The dewdrop from its wing.
But I never marked its morning flight,
I never heard it sing.
For I was stooping once again
Under the horrid thing.

There is, without question, both in the humorous and the pathetic, a strong kinship between Dickens and Hood. But what pathos is Hood's, that exquisite lyric, *The Bridge of Sighs*, can certify—a precious gem wherein are crystallized and concentrated all the sadness, struggle, and mystery of the great city, of all great cities, of all human life and its sin and sorrow. A true heart of sympathetic sorrow is quivering in every line—such pity as Christ's would have been over some despairing Magdalen, tired of life's fitful fever and the pitilessness of humanity.

It is like stepping into a different chamber to turn to the name of Matthew Arnold, the apostle of culture and restraint. Favoured by fortune from his birth, Arnold achieved great poetical success, but the man who died under the battle against poverty was the truer poet. Arnold's poetry is largely poetry of the head, appealing mostly to the eye, and very seldom to the heart, with little of the true lyric lilt and swing. Like most poets who follow a formulated theory, in his best work he refutes his own programme. Arnold's theory was that of "epic or classical objectivity," yet in his noblest moods he is subjective. All through he gives the effect, not of a born musician, but of a skilful operator, well-trained by the practice of scales. The question, of course, comes to be whether an artist working in definite limits, can achieve anything like greatness, or can ever work with that unconsciousness of art, which is true art.

His *Sohrab and Rustum* is his finest poem, having a

human interest in it. In many places, its diction and tone-breadth might well be envied by any poet, especially in its climax :

But the majestic river floated on,
 Out of the mist and hum of that low land,
 Into the frosty starlight, and there moved,
 Rejoicing, through the hush'd Chorasmian waste,
 Under the solitary moon ; . . .
 . . . then sands begin
 To hem his watery march, and dam his streams,
 And split his currents ; that for many a league
 The shorn and parcell'd Oxus strains along
 Through beds of sand and matted rushy isles—
 Oxus, forgetting the bright speed he had
 In his high mountain-cradle in Pamere,
 A foil'd circuitous wanderer—till at last
 The long'd-for dash of waves is heard, and wide
 His luminous home of waters opens, bright
 And tranquil, from whose floor the new-bathed stars
 Emerge, and shine upon the Aral Sea.

He is displeased with the age. He owns he cannot attain to "Wordsworth's sweet calm, or Goethe's wide and luminous view," yet this not through any want in his own nature, but from the busy frenzy and fever of the times.

For we, brought forth and reared in hours
 Of change, alarm, surprise,—
 What shelter to grow ripe is ours ?
 What leisure to grow wise ?

His play of *Empedocles on Etna* was an example of his theory. He held that we must go back to the ancients, and reproduce classical models, for, said he, "the ancients knew what they wanted in art, and we do not." But surely anything in art is better than mere reproduction. We should have no spontaneous song of a nation or people by such methods. Nay, in searching after art, does not art perish ? Is it not like

searching after the secret of life in a dissecting-room? The very thing you search for, must ever evade the knife. And when we compare the skylark lilt of Burns's songs with the savour of academic life and cloistered thought of Arnold's lines, the testimony of our hearts refutes his theory.

CHAPTER IX

THE BROWNING

IN our progress towards the other great and representative trio of Victorian poets our path lies past Elizabeth Barrett Browning, unquestionably the greatest woman poet the world has ever seen. In that she had a most wide and varied culture she differed from the other women poets, who were too frequently dilettante rhyme-makers, whose red-eyed muse was addicted to the use of a damp handkerchief. She was a scholar in Hebrew and the classics, and she had inspiration. Her soul was altogether seraphic fire of poetry. "Poetry," she said, "has been to me as serious a thing as life itself, and life has been a very serious thing."

We get a glimpse of the strong poetic fibre of her nature, in Adam's address to Lucifer :

The prodigy
Of thy vast brows and melancholy eyes
Which comprehend the heights of some great fall,—
I think that thou hast one day worn a crown.

Yet, she shewed that such a lofty vein of poesy did not restrain her from taking a close living interest in the political and social questions of humanity, as in the *Cry of the Children*, the indignant, heart-pouring protest against the white slavery which had been exposed in Horne's Report of his Commission. In 1851 appeared

in the same volume her *Casa Guidi Windows* and *Sonnets from the Portuguese*, among the very finest of English subjective poems, filled with the glory of Love's truest utterance, a perfect triumph of feeling, quivering with the blood of a woman's heart. Five years later *Aurora Leigh* was published. These were indubitably her greatest works. Her ballads, *Duchess May*, and *Bertha in the Lane*, go straight to the core of human sympathy. For subjective interest and beauty her sonnets get in amongst the movements of Shakespeare's, and with Tennyson's *In Memoriam*, but they stand by themselves in dealing with the intense warm life of love, highest and purest, which is the manifestation of heart, without being the product of heart disease.

With her, unfortunately, as her later work shewed, fluency was a hindrance. She did not exercise sufficient self-constraint, and overlooked that high necessity of poets,—unflattering self-criticism as applied to their productions. She was carried away by the swelling sail of her own power, yet the simple Gothic dignity of that noble poem, *The Sleep*, breathing fragrance of incense from the altar of human experience, rests over her memory as an immortal monument.

She sings of love and sorrow, but she preaches, like Carlyle, the true Gospel of Work.

God says "Sweat
For foreheads"—men say "crowns"—and so we are crowned,—
Ay, gashed by some tormenting circle of steel
Which snaps with secret spring. Get work—get work.
Be sure, 'tis better than what you work to get.

And again :

O cousin, let us be content in work
To do the thing we can, and not presume
To fret because it's little.

But perhaps the summary of her creed is in the lines from *Duchess May* :

Oh the little birds sang east, and the little birds sang
west,—

Toll slowly !

And I smiled to think God's greatness flowed around our
incompleteness,—

Round our restlessness, His rest.

God under, God above, God about, and God within, is a steadying faith in a world that is often unsteady, and in a heart that frequently beats not true.

She fell asleep in Florence in 1861, the Sibyl of English poetry, a unique figure and voice, alone in the centuries.

Her husband, Robert Browning, was of poets the second greatest in the Victorian age—and second only because Tennyson was first. He has much more of the dramatic poet in his composition. Tennyson looked not so much at the individual character ; he saw the organic unity of the universe in the roll of the ages and the courses of the stars. Browning penetrated into the inmost heart of man. With biology and psychology as his guides, he walked through the shadowy vistas of human nature. In his nervous work, inwrought with character and intense human passion, he brings beneath the spell of his dramatic and psychological mastery his favourite problem, the real victory of the soul, achieved through the apparent failure of earthly life. He judges the heart not from its external action, like the early stage-craftsmen, but from the deepest insearch through the manifold puzzlement of the innermost deeps of spiritual activity. A Thor-hammer sort of genius, battling and beating with word-power, rhyme-power ; and, by the daemonic spell of secret knowledge, dragging a naked spirit out of the dark into the blaze

of judgment, he lived and thought, free from the conventionalities of the age he lived in, isolated in modes and aims, with a unique grip and earnestness, all-searching, all-pervading power. His genius winnows human purposes and human ambitions as with a sifting wind.

The succeeding generations may lift him nearer the Immortals than any of his contemporaries. A man of strong ideas, and surging life, he sometimes finds language a burden, the very words he uses weak for what they must labour under, staggering up steep ways of thought, heightwards. That is the secret of the strangeness which at first strikes you in Browning's work. The poet who could, out of the same heart, write *The Ring and the Book* and the exquisite—

Beautiful Evelyn Hope is dead,
Sit and watch by her side one hour. . . .

See, I give you this flower to keep,
I fold it close in your snow-white hand.
So—that is the message ; go to sleep—
You will wake and remember and understand !

well knew the kaleidoscope of the human heart. He is one of those who have seen the skirts of God's purposes, and caught the fire of the spheres. I have not much sympathy with that school of criticism which quarrels with a man because he does not talk like a book on etiquette, when his soul is quivering with its message, and his utterance thick with the energy of earnest passion. Hear what he says, for it is truth as he has seen and read it by the light of his own experience. And when a man so speaks, having so seen, he is, in a very large measure, above rule and measure. Look at this bit of the eternal mystery which he gives us in his play of *Paracelsus* :

Festus, strange secrets are let out by Death,
 Who blabs so oft the follies of this world.
 And I am Death's familiar, as you know—
 I helped a man to die, a few weeks since.

. . . No mean trick

He left untried, and truly well-nigh wormed
 All traces of God's finger out of him,
 Then died, grown old ; and, just an hour before,
 Having lain long with blank and soulless eyes,
 He sate up suddenly, and with natural voice
 Said that in spite of thick air and closed doors
 God told him it was June ; and he knew well
 Without such telling, harebells grew in June,
 And all that kings could ever give to him
 Would not be precious as those blooms to him.

There is here a largeness of manner, a fineness of strong dramatic speech, a tenderness of feeling unexcelled, save by Shakespeare's touch that made the dying Falstaff "babble o' green fields."

He has three dramatic masterpieces, *Pippa Passes*, *A Blot on the 'Scutcheon*, and *Colombe's Birthday*. Truly a great poet died when Browning passed away. He studied human hearts rather than phases of nature. Who dare criticize such a soul? It is so cheap to carp and quarrel with utterance which is above a man's own period.

He, too, has his creed of work and its measurement.

All service is the same with God.
 With God, whose puppets best and worst
 Are we,—there is no last nor first.

And so he gave his answer to the world.

CHAPTER X

TENNYSON

IN Tennyson, you find most of all the voice of Thought as uttered in the nineteenth century. Swinburne carried the mellow guitar of the troubadours, with its old lilt still clinging like musk to the strings of it, into our day. But Tennyson spoke, with modern voice, of modern pain and peace. The age into which he was born was not one of enthusiasms in religion or science, and yet the angel of a new period was beginning to trouble the waters. A great change was about to take place in the world of politics, and the religious life was itself to undergo considerable modification.

The semi-atheism of the eighteenth century had died from weakness of heart. It had no warm blood to keep it living. Nevertheless, the search for faith beyond the forms of faith had given fresh ideals to thoughtful men. Theology and Science got into close grips. The main struggle was between old forms of dogmatic theology and the new scientific theory of evolution. Tennyson's position in English poetry is that he stands heart-deep in those conflicting times, seeking for truth, and best answering many of the perplexities of the age through his own sorrow and the sorrow of others.

He was born in a house of books, the best kind of university for any soul. All the great thinkers of the

past, with the voice of the sea and of wide spaces, spoke to him, and he learned their secrets. He had not that contact with politics, poverty, or exile such as marked the experience of the Greek tragedians, of Milton in England, Dante in Italy, and Burns in Scotland ; neither had his soul known the consuming passions of Byron. His thought ripened, grew, and deepened, through quiet contemplation. He had a wide culture in English, Latin, Greek, and Italian literature, and he made friends of the cleverest and greatest men of his time.

His first book of verse in 1830, was published at the neap-tide of English poetry. The singing waters had far withdrawn their stream. The flame of inspiration was behind a cloud. Scott was approaching his end ; Keats, Shelley, and Byron were dead ; Coleridge and Wordsworth were burned out. The influence of Sir Walter had given predominance to the novel, and poetry was neglected. The little book, however, told the world his ideals. He shows how

The poet in a golden clime was born,
With golden stars above ;
Dowered with the hate of hate, the scorn of scorn,
The love of love.

He sees breaking a new dawn for the world. He beholds freedom, clad in wisdom, coming to man, awakening him to his high destiny, and shattering into ruin, through truth, all wrong, error, and oppression, however long established.

Three years later, he came again before the world with a volume which contains, among others, such triumphs of metre and melody as *The Lotus Eaters* and *Mariana*.

He lives in the hearts of men most of all by his *In Memoriam* and his *Idylls of the King*.

In Memoriam is a book of short elegies, or lamenta-

tions over the loss of his friend Arthur Hallam, whom he loved like his own soul. Hallam was to have married the poet's sister, but at Vienna he was suddenly struck down with apoplexy. It was as though he had been slain by a thunderbolt that smote the heart of Tennyson also. The poet's love broods over the loss of love. He questions the grave, and tries to seize the grim robber Death by his garments, to wring from him the meaning of his theft. The most remarkable thing about the poem is that, while it is a passionate, bitter cry out of the agony of a personal bereavement, it expresses and embodies in an entirely unique manner the sorrow of the whole race. It holds the cup of individual consolation to the lips of the universal grief. It is the pilgrimage of a soul stepping through the night of sorrow from hope to hope, sometimes unsteady enough beneath his feet. It moves out from the stun of sudden bereavement to the assurance of the gladness of love's victory over death and the grave.

He finds, what everybody finds at first, in such an experience, that the commonness of human loss is no satisfaction for the soul in its own passion. That the grave is the end of all mortal effort here, gives him no comfort, when it yawns and closes over his beloved. That the tomb is a portal on a highway which leads onwards, gives him no strength, since there is not a footmark of one returning to tell what lies beyond. Even Lazarus, who for four days had been in touch with the inner secret, gave no revelation of what he had looked upon. So this poet, in his sorrow, tries every bridge, knocks at every door. His grief is determined to get at God's feet for an answer to its pain, even if it can clamber only by broken roads. He is asking all the while, as every bereaved soul asks, whether God exists as eternal Love, remembering, or is only the forgetful

Governor of a tangled and uncertain world. He questions all the creeds, some of them worn through. Yet, what if, through the ragged holes, frayed by time and human experience, one may get to see God only the clearer? Often his inquiry brings him into desert places, where there are no wells, where he can drink only his own tears. But, while he finds it hard sometimes to believe in God, he finds it harder not to believe. And so he fights his doubt, and hushes his fears, until he grips hold of love in the darkness, and steadies himself upon his feet, in faith. Between the two questions of evolution of man from lowest forms, and direct creation of man by God, he searches for a key to the history of the soul. And so, at last, he finds that there is a sunny side to doubt; and he feels beneath his feet the throb of the forward impulse of all things in the line of

One far-off divine event
To which the whole creation moves.

Unsatisfactory to him were both dogmatic assertion and dogmatic denial—alike the narrowness of bigotry and the narrowness of atheism. He wished less of dead formal creed, and more of living Christianity. He felt that the way of loving trustfulness was the way to God. To fight for the best, and die for the noblest, because existence was strung upon a divine purpose, was his creed.

Better not to be at all
Than not be noble.

That was the purpose, which, like the sound of water gurgling in the dark, is in the heart of his *Idylls of the King*, where the knights of the Celtic court of King Arthur ride everywhere, trying to set up truth against the world's impurity, luxury, and deceit.

He was a great religious poet. Search through his

In Memoriam and his *Idylls*, and you will find this to be his faith,—pray, labour, be true, battling and seeking with a pure heart, and a clean eye; with death only love's shadow cast by the sun behind it, over life's workshop floor; till, as in his last noble swan song of faith, he expresses it:

That which drew from out the boundless deep
Turns again home.

He believed in God, in love, in the loveliness of the human soul kept upright by high ideals, in the power of humanity to rise, and to uplift, and in a life beyond the grave where what is dark and mysterious meanwhile shall be illumined deathlessly. That is a vast creed, the depth, breadth, height, and ineffable majesty of which all human thought and human necessity never can exhaust.

CHAPTER XI

SWINBURNE AND THE VICTORIAN AGE

SWINBURNE stands forward, above all, for marvellous mastery of the rhythm and rhyme resources of the English tongue. Possessed of a superb manner, a majestic style, which largely, however, over-dominates all his work, till there seems in much of it an artificial glitter like a frosted picture—lacking humour, with limited inventive faculty, with few objective studies, and no great variety of mood, he had a music, swing, and elation that lift him from his fellows, and give him right to stand among the greatest three upon the bridge of Victorian poesy. He takes the lyre of the English tongue, as a master takes an old violin that has lain in a dusty corner, and he sounds the heights and depths of passion on it, revealing resources hitherto undreamed of. Music runs riot in his verse, till one feels inclined to put forward one's hand and push in a stop while the musician is lost in exuberant melody. His fault is an excess of alliteration, and accentuation of rare pulsations, so various that variety becomes monotony. His play of *Bothwell* easily gives him a footing in the front line of modern poets for true dramatic power, though it lacks humour, song, and by-play, so necessary for successful drama. In it, however, the grandeur of his theme seems to have drowned out his mannerisms and excess, and,

as a dramatic epic, it is unexcelled. He enriched the passionate melody of English verse, but he did not add to the value of its thought.

As we saw, then, the Victorian age was an age of religious, scientific, and philosophic movement, and we should expect at first religio-philosophic poetry, which we have in that school of which the highest voice is Tennyson. Swinburne is a swing back to old Greek models and thought, with a voice essentially modern, and with new resources of metre and word-music ; while Browning is the old primitive fire, genius, and passion, with the spirit of the Berserker in every line.

Alongside of these protagonists were the school of Rossetti, that beautiful soul of Art, painter and poet in one, and the later school of Dilettantism as represented by Dobson and Lang. In the closing years of the Victorian period, the poetic mind, embarrassed for great themes, turned to Sonnets, Ballades, and the old forms of art expression. Indeed, perhaps no generation could produce a more voluminous anthology of lyrical verse in all the range of English literature. The air was full of singing, much of it noble song. The ages succeeding may have difficulty in selection of the fittest of the minor voices ; but it will have no difficulty, even blindfold, in grasping true and good work.

An age of great poetry and of dramatic form, yet not an age of the drama, in the big sense, such as the Elizabethan age gave to us. Why ? Is it not a dramatic age ? Are not the struggle and the contact of man with man stronger, fiercer, more persistent than ever ? True, it may be ; and true also that out of such conflict the drama rises. But the days are changed. The age of Elizabeth was the natural nursery-ground of such a school. A man could hardly live in it, amid the large interests then stalking through the land, without being kindled

into greatness of some kind, as he jostled these ; and a poet could hardly help being dramatic. Perhaps, there is a great upheaval waiting for us. Perhaps, not till the vast oceans are shook with war's dreadful thunder in the momentous international struggle for world-power towards which the nations seem drifting, armed to the teeth ; or after that apparently inevitable battle which shall one day shake the Himalayan Hills with indignant thunder, when the gates of India have to stand the shock ; then may some great and noble soul be kindled to the deathless task of singing either a paean of his country's triumph, or a bale-fire tragedy above his country's grave.

Tennyson, who wrote plays, did not write a drama. With all his greatness, beauty, and power, this great singer of the Victorian epoch had his defects, and this was one of them. He did not mix with the bustle of men in the outside realism of workaday. He had not to elbow his way through the crowd, and come against the corners of all sorts and conditions of men that make up a world. Hence he fails as a dramatic poet, for the multifarious life of humanity is the real school of the dramatist. Shakespeare learned more of humanity when holding horses at the theatre door, and more of dramatic craftsmanship when shifting scenes, than he could have otherwise encountered anywhere. A dramatist must be wading-deep in the struggle of his community and age. He has to express their conflict and passion, joy and sorrow, virtue and crime ; and the whirlpool can only be described best by those who have been tossed upon it, or at least observed it from as near a distance as possible, without being sucked down into death itself. His quiet life of contemplative seclusion, his abstraction from the whirl and bustle of men, tended to make him the student and exponent of humanity in the abstract. The figures, therefore, in his great

work are shadowy as a whole, and have not the warm passionate flesh and blood of Browning or Swinburne, or even of the minor Neo-Romantic School. Instead of a play he gives rather a succession of striking episodes, or scenes. *Becket*, his greatest effort in this direction, produced with a lavish expenditure of scenic display and setting, and supported by Irving, confirms this idea. It had power and pathos; but they were those of the *Idylls of the King*; not like the Swan of Avon, not like "rare Ben," not like rough-and-tumble Kit Marlowe, not with the deep passion of that life which kindles, from contact of passion, fire, fury, and flame, the tragedy and comedy of men. It had humour; but it was that of the *Northern Farmer*. It was, in fact, a book play, a running accompaniment to the solo of an Irving,—a setting for a portrait, not much more.

Browning had the dramatic genius, yet he was too prolix, too involved, and what he gave was neither drama nor epic. In fact, he had his foot on both of these while ruminating on the intangible problems of spiritual metaphysic. He was a kind of Hamlet, perhaps, of English literature, brooding on life's questions and contradictions, with "Alas! poor Yorick!"

CHAPTER XII

FICTION AND HISTORY

THE dominant power in Literature to-day is that form of creative fiction which is called the novel. The word was borrowed from the Italian writers of romantic stories ; and it was brought into the English language by the Elizabethan writers. The modern novel is, however, a more complicated creation than that which they so described, having a certain complicated plot and counter-plot, with the play of passion and contesting interests, reflection of character, thought, politics, religion and life, motion and emotion,—in fact there is no limitation to the field, and to the subject-matter of the fiction-writer.

The function of fiction is, in effect, so long as it is claiming to be truly Literature, the function of the ethical teacher. It is not journalism, or the school of the evanescent, which reflects the life of the moment only to be flung aside and used for fire-lighters, for wrapping parcels, or lining the trunks of farm-servants. Yet, it reflects men and manners ; although the teaching function of it is not obviously in the foreground. The “preachy” novel is either a soporific, or an irritant ; yet, the novel, to be abiding, must be an influence, and preach almost without itself or its reader knowing. Its power should grip a man, as though strong hands were suddenly thrust out to clutch the heart. As it shews the soul wander-

ing out of the straight track into tragedy, the reader cannot keep himself from looking over his shoulder to note the entanglements of his own footprints. Or the snow-white devotion of a saintly spirit stirs impulses for good that are lying dormant in the depths of being, just as strongly as the patience of Griselda moved the Middle Ages to admiration, and probably to emulation, of her example. Rebecca stands out thus on the page of Sir Walter. So, also, as a deathless instance of love that never faileth, enduring all things for love's sake, Jeanie Deans, walking to London to beg for the pardon of her erring sister, has walked right into the affectionate remembrance of the sympathetic world. The simple fidelity of the clansman to his chief shines also from the page of Scott, and all the romantic glamour of the story of our northern race moves like a wizard's spell about his writing.

The finest example of the ethical quality of fiction, for our purpose, is, perhaps, Nathaniel Hawthorne's *Scarlet Letter*, so powerful and delicate in its way of dealing with a terrible subject, with its rich vocabulary of thought and fancy, like clustered grapes, which all the treading of the crowds gathered at the vintage of the soul's experience never can press dry.

This book of an episode in the moral life of Puritan New England three hundred years ago, has become conscience's remembrancer, the world over, for all time. It is a veiled prophet with warning finger pointing to the sinning soul, and to the heart that is tempted, telling of remorse that never sleeps, and justice that never leaves the track of the sinner. Such a plot it is, as, if put in the hands of any other than Hawthorne the Puritan, would become a repulsive thing, unpleasant to think of, and dangerous to read.

If a man could find balm which could assuage the

pain of the unrest that springs from the memory of Sin, all the living and the dead would rise and crown him.

This book of Nathaniel Hawthorne is a book which draws aside the curtain from a human heart and shews unsleeping memory staring red-eyed at the ruins it has made. No drug can silence it. Not the whole ocean can wash it clean.

The old Greek tragedians knew what conscience meant. And it seemed to them that, when a man stepped into evil, he set in motion all the invisible mechanisms of the universe to crush and punish him; the furies with the hissing snakes in their hair, swift-footed, pursued him, unwearying, wearing the hot fever of his young blood down.

In the *Scarlet Letter*, the unsleeping soul of Arthur Dimmesdale, the sinner who held his peace and suffered her who shared his sin to bear the burden of the universe upon her life, skirts the borderland of madness, urged and scourged by conscience, which will give him no rest.

Its problem is the very greatest. What remedy is there for the universe unbalanced and unhinged? Repentance, says the theologian. But what is repentance? Sorrow for the uncomfortable and disquieting consequences of evil, is the commonest interpretation of the word. I sinned yesterday, and I have a headache or a heartache to-day; but am I more sorry for the inconvenient consequences than for the sin that stains my soul? True repentance is a far more uncommon thing than that. Every thief, every discovered fraud, every drunkard awakening out of his sleep of debauchery, every tramp walking through the night, in the cold, with his feet through his boots, would be in truth, then, a repentant sinner. For there is not one who does not regret that, in consequence of his sin, he has been flung like a worthless weed out of the esteem of his fellow-men,

out of the fields of usefulness in ordinary life, out of comfort, ease, and honour, it may be. Nay, true repentance is the "Never Again" of the soul. It would be nothing at all if it did not attempt to build up the broken wall of resolve, to mend the wounds in the heart, and cleanse the floor defiled in the House of Life.

Further, repentance postponed is very apt to develop into fruitless regret. The frost of the soul's winter is apt to grip and blight the flowers of a tardy repentance. And, even when a conscience awakes, repentance cannot mend again the broken heart. The victim of your passion, the comrade of your sin still remains with the ruins of her life about her feet. Your repentance cannot make pure again the heart that you defiled. The lily-white of a virgin soul has the smudge of your impurity upon it, unbleachably. These are the warnings that Sin gives to us to-day. And these are the lessons driven hard in upon us by this saintly soul, Nathaniel Hawthorne, in the *Scarlet Letter*, wherein he shews us how one act awakes remorse which dogs its author, through despair, to the sudden mercy of God.

The same power is found in Lucas Malet's *Wages of Sin*, wherein are shewn the inextricable entanglements which sin, yielded to, lays, like chains of bondage, round the feet of the sinner.

In Scott, Thackeray, and Dickens, a vastly important contribution was made to the philosophy of religion and ethics. No men since the great dramatists of Greece and England have with clearer strength set the life of man against the unchanging background of eternal law. Every time you read them, you are lifted nearer the realm of nobler virtues, and find the strength of moral sunshine in your heart.

Scott has whole rows of wonder-windows through

which you look, and see, as in a march-past, or as when you get a peep into a barrack-room, or pray in a quiet cathedral, or hear a snatch of music blown from far away,—the shapes and thoughts of men and women who move together, impelled by brave deed and holiest thought, in battle-field or at fireside, and in holy places, endowed with all the magic of the history of our race. Quentin Durward and the Scottish Archers at the Court of France; Rob Roy in his highland fastnesses; Dugald Dalgetty with his memories of all the campaigns in Europe, through which he had trailed his hungry sword; Argyle the Crafty and Argyle the Kind; Jeanie Deans; the Laird of Dumbiedykes, Bailie Nicol Jarvie, Fergus MacIvor, Caleb Balderstone—is there a limit to them or a bound set to their inspiration?

The same wonderful power of masterly insight into the deepest recesses of human nature, the sympathy that stirs, the passion that shakes the spirit, is in Dickens and Thackeray, in Hardy and Meredith. The humour and pathos of Dickens have given to English literature pictures innumerable, and have created a literature about themselves. Thackeray has too much been looked upon merely as a cynic. There is no doubt he has upon his lips a scorn for human weakness and the foibles of vice. Dickens makes you laugh with him, but Thackeray lets you see him laughing at these; and, when he draws aside the veil, he makes you behold, with a deeper vision, the shallow ambitions, the mean pursuits, and the low ideals that satisfy mankind. Hardy and Meredith, of the moderns, know what a soul's pilgrimage means, what thirsts are in the desert, and what sweet wells are in the oases of life.

Fiction makes us read the lessons of honour and ambition side by side, and learn the warnings of History—that shadow with the finger on her lips; of how,

while a Napoleon can transmit electric enthusiasms through a devoted peasantry till they shine above self-sacrifice for his sake, yet self-glory brings death, exile, and vanity, over even such an enterprise as Napoleon's.

We must get into contact also with the spirit which made us what we are ; and we were hewn from a sea-rock. We are a maritime race. Our life has grown like sea-tangle about the coves of the world. Clark Russell will therefore get a place on the shelf by the fire. His *Wreck of the Grosvenor*, his *John Oxenham*, *Second Mate*, and Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island*, inexhaustible in its delight, bring into your very room the wash of the sea in remote lagoons, till the tang of the salt-wave thrills your midnight thought.

We are a restless race. The waves and the winds have been calling us through all the generations to come out to the open road and follow them. You will find the secret of that in such a thing as Neil Munro's *Lost Pibroch*, the mysterious pipe-tune that men, even the most skilful, have forgotten, that even the man who knows it does not like to play, because it sets astir in the heart the longing to be up and away, making the foot ache and itch for the path across the hills. But the two great pipers meet, and they talk of their tunes, and their musical mysteries, long into the dark ; till, at last, the mystic pibroch is blown into the night. And the villagers cannot rest for listening, cannot sleep for the masterly music beating up the glen, as on wide wings, through the dark,—cannot stay in their houses for the charm of the great voices ; and, when the pipers cease, and the villagers turn to go to rest, every heart among them has no satisfaction ever again in the quiet life ; but, when the year comes round once more, the houses will be found empty, and the glens desolate, except for the very old, and the children ; for “the lost

pibroch " of the wandering way has gripped them, and the world will claim its tribute.

It is good to get fixed into a special period. It is good to have a hobby in your reading. Take, for example, the Jacobite period of our romantic history, its richest heart-deep romantic throb, beginning not with the *Albemarle Papers*, or the *Stewart Papers*, but with Sir Walter's *Waverley*. Then gather into your shelf *Kidnapped*, *John Splendid*, *Catriona*, *The Shoes of Fortune*, *Redgauntlet*, and *Peveril of the Peak*. A man should feel, then, as though he had gone through that most thrilling campaign, and had made personal friends on its battle-fields, and known intimately its places where defeat ran stooping amongst the heather, or hid, with slow-healing wounds, in crags above the beating sea.

Thereafter, one can go back to the beginnings, tasting the joy of the ocean itself, getting to know of Cædmon, above whose sad heart, sleeping among the voiceless cattle, heaven loosened the beginnings of English song; Aldhelm on the bridge at Malmesbury, singing of Christ; Bede toiling at the transformation of Holy Scripture out of the dead Latin sleep in which it was bound, into the melody of the English tongue; Columba stepping from his coracle into lone Iona to light the lamp of Christ for the West; Wallace, whose heart, plucked out of his bosom, was the fountain of Scotland's liberty; and Bruce, who shook tyranny to its knees at Bannockburn.

CHAPTER XIII

ESSAY AND BIOGRAPHY

THE Essay may perhaps be styled the sonnet of prose writing, as it expresses lightly the view of the writer on any subject. It is not a treatise, but an entirely personal opinion. Brevity being its mark, it may be a vehicle of gentle humour, clean and polished wit, tabloided thought, and pregnant suggestion. The Seigneur Michael de Montaigne has well been styled "the father of the essay." His powers of observation of nature and humanity, with a uniquely winning spell of self-revealing, give his work a charm which has never been excelled.

In this respect, in English literature, Bacon occupies the principal position amongst essay-writers. His *Essays* are concise analyses of life, its problems, its lessons and its duties. They should be near at hand, always, for quiet moments, for enrichment, up-stirring, and crystallization of moods. They are the resultant ore of a vast and remarkable experimental knowledge of God and a man's own self. With charm inexpressible, Charles Lamb made the Essay the vehicle of the most entrancing philosophy of life, holding the generations by his characteristic talk, which perpetuates, even through the medium of cold print, his whimsical outlook on men and things, and on the world at large, while his gentle and

most lovable heart is beating in it all. Hazlitt, in a more discursive way, comes very close for interest and helpfulness, while in between speaks the voice of Owen Felltham, a kind of Bacon half in holy orders. His *Resolves* are very suggestive and fruitful ; and should be better known and more widely read.

The Essay may be, however, woven around criticism, as in the work of Lord Macaulay and Matthew Arnold, though with them it becomes most frequently a lengthened article on a given subject, or even the pamphlet of a reviewer. Nevertheless, in a way in which neither article nor review has ever achieved it, Macaulay's *Essays* hold a place of their own in Literature. What a miscellaneous company of topics is in them. One can never forget reading about Clive and the Indian beginnings, the rolling drums and cymbals of the essay on John Milton, on Bunyan, on Johnson, and Warren Hastings, and the essay on Italian poetry. You make acquaintance there with a thorough gentleman, and taste the opinions of a man of honour. There is not a base thought, a degraded or degrading paragraph, from cover to cover. It is a gallery of portraits of living men, not a catalogue of wax-works. How he steeps himself in every detail of his period, and learns about every pulse of his hero. You remember how he used to haunt old book-shops, buying up ballad bundles, till he had, sometimes, a long train of followers, wondering when he was to begin to sing them on the street ! Look at the details embodied in his early ballad of *The Armada*, and in *The Lays of Ancient Rome* ; and you will understand the power and strength of accuracy sought and found by labour.

Practically within the circle of the Essay comes Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus*, with its quaint criticism of life, its thoughts that you can never empty of the deep

wealth of truth that is in them. Under the form of a picture, sardonic, biting, and snell as a clean wind blown from snow-slopes, of "the world in clothes" and the "world out of clothes," he gives us a glimpse of the struggles of a soul, even his own soul, seeking for wisdom, the key of the spiritual mystery of the awful ME, the God-given life of man. The great quest is the understanding of Duty, and the influence of infinity and eternity upon man's heart. The autobiographical flame in this book leads into the inner recesses of the soul, where ghostly secrets lie sleeping, making a man go on bravely doubting through darkness into the light.

Carlyle's *Heroes and Hero-Worship* is practically also a book of essays, giving in his own broad brush-work, out of his own paint-pitcher, portraits of the great souls that made history. Many a midnight and early morning hour it has peopled with majestic shades through the medium of its pages. His are characteristic portraits, not telling you quite what kind of nose your hero had, or what the colour of his eyes—though that all comes out also, somehow—but what kind of heart he had; and how his soul was white; how the world could not stain it, could not make those soaring wings brook chains; how it was a fearless angel that lived in the trembling clay, and neither man's cruelty nor the frown of kings could turn it out of the path where duty called it. You can understand, then, how Luther, standing up before his enemies, cried out, "Here stand I. God help me. I cannot do otherwise!" You can understand, then, how John Knox made even his enemies respect him, and wrung from the Regent Morton over his frail dead body the unique eulogy, "There lies one who never feared the face of man." That book of Carlyle, the Scottish sage, will make the man who trusts in it a strong man. Its influence will be felt in his life when

he goes out to master the world. This book is one of the brave things of Literature, for it is throttling the verdict of men, adverse to the fame of those he speaks of, and making the jury of the Court of Fair-play reverse ancient decisions. Carlyle is herein a man *solus contra mundum*; and he overcame the world with his plea for the dead, misunderstood, yet heroic. He lifts the judgments upon these out of the field of party opinion. Mahomet, Cromwell, Knox, Burns, Johnson, the strength of them, the force of them, the truth-seeking invincibility of them, are shewn to be of undying moment till to-day. The force of Mahomet which made him master the materialism of his time with a monotheistic religion; of Cromwell which made him write, though he had to write it on a scaffold with a monarch's life-blood, and on many a trampled field in heaps of slain, that a nation has a heart to feel, a soul to think, and liberty and ideals which cannot be crushed and killed—such men, he cries, succeeded, not by charlatanry or mesmeric trick, but by the unquenchable fire of truth, touched into masterly activity by contact with the Universal.

Beside the Essay should be placed Biography in our view of Literature; and there is but one biography in English literature. It is Boswell's *Life of Johnson*. That life of strenuous battle against poverty and disease is for all time a rebuke upon laziness, forgetfulness, selfishness, and ease. As we read it we feel the proud defiance of his letter to Lord Chesterfield ring through our heart:

“Seven years, my lord, have now passed since I waited in your outward rooms, and was repulsed from your door; during which time I have been pushing on my work through difficulties of which it is useless to complain, and have brought it at last to the verge of publication, without one act of assistance, one word of encouragement, and one smile of favour. . . . Is not a patron

my lord, one who looks with unconcern on a man struggling for life in the water, and, when he has reached the ground, encumbers him with help? The notice which you have been pleased to take of my labours, had it been early, had been kind; but it has been delayed till I am indifferent and cannot enjoy it; till I am solitary, and cannot impart it; till I am known, and do not want it. I hope it is no very cynical asperity not to confess obligations where no benefit has been received, or to be unwilling that the public should consider me as owing that to a patron which Providence has enabled me to do for myself."

There is an example of what true Literature teaches. A thing like that should be framed and hung up in every young man's room, to remind him of the duty of manliness, when he is inclined to be a coward.

What a book! It is a kind of Westminster Abbey of great names. It is, indeed, a living section cut straight out of the literary world of the eighteenth century.

Time cannot wither nor custom stale
Its infinite variety.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

THE following list is offered as a suggestion for reading, the elementary books being placed in the beginning, the more elaborate lower in the catalogue, in the hope that it may be a guide for the formation of a little library. Besides these, ample opportunity is afforded for the serious student by the great treasure-house of low-priced literature published to-day.

- Stopford Brooke's *Primer of English Literature*. 1s.
 Brooke's *Milton* ("Great Writers Series"). 1s. 6d.
 Dowden's *Primer of Shakespeare*. 1s.
 Worsfield's *Judgment in Literature*. 1s.
 Craik's *Manual of English Literature* ("Everyman's"). 1s.
 Brooke's *Theology in the English Poets* ("Everyman's"). 1s.
 Pryde's *Studies in Composition*. 2s.
 Hall's *English Grammar*. 3s. 6d.
 Bain's *Rhetoric*. 2 vols. 7s.
 Fowler's *The King's English*. 5s.
 Palgrave's *Golden Treasury of English Songs and Lyrics*. 1s.
 Gowans's *Hundred Best Poems*. Two Series. 1s. each.
 Sharp's *Sonnets of this Century*. 1s. (Canterbury Poets.)
 „ *Great Odes*. 1s. (Canterbury Poets.)
 Gleeson White's *Ballades and Rondeaux*. 1s. (Canterbury Poets.)
 Arnold's *Essays in Criticism*. 1s. (Routledge's New University Library.)
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 MacLean Watt's *Attic and Elizabethan Tragedy*. 7s. 6d.
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